

At a meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 10th JULY, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bell, P. Dixon, Gofton, Kelly, Paul Maddison, Morrissey, Oliver and Snowden together with Mr. H. Brown, Mrs. P. Burn, Ms. M. Carr, Mrs. M. Harrop, Mrs. C. Hutchinson, Mr. S. Laverick and Mr. D. Snowden

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of Policy and Coordination Review Committee
Councillor P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor L. Walton together with those from Mrs. D. Butler, Professor G. Holmes, Ms. A. Johnson and Mr. A. Pearce

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on the 17th April, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Ball as being in attendance.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations on interest made.

Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Quarterly Report

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with an introduction to a performance report to be presented by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman advised that this was the first of the quarterly reports from the Portfolio Holder the Committee would be receiving over the municipal year and thanked Councillor Smith for her attendance at the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the Committee for inviting her to the meeting and advised that at each of the quarterly updates she would be updating Members on the progress the Directorate was making and had made during the year to improve services for children within the city in line with the targets and aims in the Corporate Improvement Plan.

Councillor Smith provided Members of the Committee with a table of the key actions for portfolio improvement in relation to the Children's Services, and highlighted the following areas which were of significant importance at the present time:-

- Consultation on the Integrated Youth Strategy;
- Establishing locally based teams in 6 areas of the city as part of the Targeted Youth Support Initiative;
- Improving the Child and Family Support Service with 17 case managers going to Children's Centres in the city;
- Ongoing work on 'Tackling Racism' as part of the Council's equality and diversity work; and
- Consultation on the school place planning process.

In closing her presentation she thanked the Committee for its level headed and well balanced approach to scrutinising Children's Services and looked forward to its help, views and comments on key issues over the coming year.

Councillor Oliver referred to comments made regarding the 4 Excel events which had been held and explained that following suggestions and comments from Councillors and residents, changes had been made to improve the event. He advised that some problems had arose due to the youth groups not having enough guidance from the Local Authority on how to tackle the organisation of events with regard to health and safety issues, etc and clearer guidance should be given to partner groups undertaking similar projects.

In response to a question from Councillor Oliver regarding the low turn out of parents as part of the consultation into the school place planning, Councillor Smith advised that the Council had used similar consultation processes over a number of years and turn out was always relatively low until it came to consulting on the decisions that were to be made regarding school places. This was the early stages of consultation, which was more of an information sharing exercise and when the next round of consultation began, regarding proposals to address school place issues, there could be a greater turn out of interested parties.

The Chairman referred to the locally based teams and asked how the locations would be decided upon and if they would be linked to secondary schools as this would be a good opportunity to get them back into the school environment. Ms. Judith Hay, Head of Positive Contribution and Economic Well Being, advised that the decision had been not taken on how or where to base the teams but that they would be located in each of the six regeneration areas of the city. A pilot was being

undertaken in two areas at the moment with the findings of them being discussed prior to any further decisions being made on the remaining four.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for her presentation and commented that the Committee looked forward to further updates from her in the future.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Portfolio Holder's report and presentation be received and noted.

Urgent Item

In accordance with Section 100(B) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman stated that the following item was to be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgent business to allow the appropriate involvement of the Committee throughout the review of school place planning.

School Place Planning for the Future / Primary Strategy for Change

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) in response to Members request to receive reports on school place planning to ensure their appropriate involvement throughout the review process.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Val Thompson, School Place Planning Manager, outlined the report and gave Members a presentation (copy circulated) which laid out the projected surplus places for each area of the city to the year 2013-2014 and explained the proposed action to address them.

(For copy presentation – see original minutes).

Ms. Thompson advised the Committee that the next steps of the process would involve engaging with schools before having further consultation during September to November 2008 on the options available, with the consultation on final proposals being undertaken during November/December 2008.

Mr. Snowdon asked why the data was not updated and recorded more regularly than from January to January of each year and was advised that all authorities were requested to provide the information and the sample taken during that time gave the most objective figures for a clear snapshot in time. She explained that the Admissions Team provided information at the beginning of the school year and live birth rates were also followed so that they were always aware of any developments or significant changes in the projected numbers. Mr. Snowdon commented that it may be beneficial to see the data from previous years to make a fair comparison.

Mrs. Harrop queried the content of the meetings that had taken place with the schools so far and was advised that they had primarily been an information sharing exercise with Head Teachers, Governors and some parents and staff. Mrs. Harrop explained that in her own experience, at meetings similar to this, it was the first time schools had been made party to the information and noticed mistakes in the accuracy of the data.

In response to a follow on question from the Chairman, regarding the procedure to check data was valid and correct, Ms. Thompson advised that the net capacity of schools was checked and calculated annually and as changes were made within each school, they were asked to contact the Council and keep them updated so that recalculations could be made. Following the initial meetings with the schools some feedback on the information presented had been received and amendments made where necessary.

The Chairman asked if the data and information could be checked with schools and staff before being issued into the public domain. Ms. Lynda Brown advised that the first meeting in November had been primarily to allow schools to see the initial data and make any relevant changes or challenge any information they needed to. The initial consultations gave the opportunity to share the data and give ample time for responses to be had.

The Chairman went on to ask the difference between the Published Admission Number (PAN) and the net capacity that the government use to identify surplus places and Ms. Brown explained that the net capacity was the physical size and capacity of the school. For example, if the school was built for 600 pupils but was only attended by 300 pupils then this would show a 50% surplus. Ms. Thompson explained that if a school now had a PAN of 30 but had been built to accommodate a PAN of 60 then this would still show as 50% surplus places.

Mr. Brown commented that the process had been more of an information giving session than consultation as no set proposals had been presented to the schools as yet. Sunderland had a good history of consulting with partners and this was a useful process to undertake, although it was difficult for him to think of it as consultation as there had been nothing to be consulted upon. Ms. Brown advised that they had introduced the phase into the consultation process in addition to the normal route and that further meetings would be held in September where proposals would be discussed.

Mr. Brown referred to the set of principles developed and asked how an alternative approach to school organisation and governance could reduce surplus places and was advised by Ms. Thompson that the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) suggested options were examined as it could result in better planning for surplus places. Ms. Brown gave the example of federation schools, where two schools may meet the needs of the community more effectively than one but with a single management structure.

Councillor Gofton asked if this could result in a moratorium on recruitment as there would be the potential of being overstaffed in the future if rolls continued to fall. Ms. Thompson advised that schools organised their own budgets and decisions on

appointments to staffing levels. The Council were forecasting events for the next three to five years whereas schools were looking at the present day and if more staff were required they were appointing where appropriate.

Mr. David May, Finance Manager for Children's Services, advised that this year the schools were allocated three year budget figures to work with so this was allowing them to see and arrange finances over a longer term.

Councillor Gofton referred to the siting of new school builds and gave the example of Highfield School where it had been built on the site of one of the amalgamated schools, meaning a community lost the resource in one area, whilst another gained a more improved resource in the new school. Ms. Thompson explained that they consistently looked at sites where new builds would be better sited to serve the community as a whole and planning officers would advise Children's Services of any areas they felt were appropriate and well suited for developments.

Councillor Kelly asked how the service planned for future increases in areas. He understood that pupil rolls as a whole were falling but asked how the service could react to an area where new estates were built and children of a school age would be moving into the area. Ms. Thompson informed Members that newer schools, such as Easington Lane Primary were built as one form entry schools but were designed in a way that they could easily be extended to meet the needs of the area should there be an increase. Existing schools which had reduced their capacity now offered additional resources to the community but these could be returned to teaching areas and increase capacity should the need arise in the future.

In response to a query from Councillor Snowden regarding funding to support schools in providing alternative uses out of school hours, Ms. Thompson advised that they currently worked with schools to look at the funds that were available to them and helped them to manage budgets to provide activities such as extended schools programmes and childcare, etc.

Ms. Burn commented that she was aware of community groups that had stopped using schools as a venue to hold events as the costs were too high and some found that young people did not want to attend projects that were based within a school environment. She asked if there were plans to consider the use of school accommodation as a base for community and voluntary partners to hire and was advised that this would form part of the next round of consultation and that they would ensure the groups were involved in the discussions that were had.

In response to a query from Mr. Brown regarding schools which may plan for future decreases by being prudent with funding from its current budget, Mr. May advised that schools were only allowed to carry over 5-8% of their yearly budget, any more than this had to fit certain criteria. He explained that funding going into schools was pupil driven and if there was a downward trend in the pupil roll this would be consistent in the budgets also. Councillors Gofton and Kelly raised their concerns if schools were saving budgets from today's pupils to cover falling pupil rolls in future years.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Thompson for her informative presentation and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that Members views on the School Place Planning for the future so far and the draft Primary Strategy for Change be considered as part of the consultation process.

Reference from Cabinet – Youth Justice Plan 2008-2009

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) appending a report of the Director of Children's Services which had been presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 9th July, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Guy Kirk, Youth Offending Service Manager, presented the report advising that it sought approval by Council to publish and distribute the Youth Justice Plan 2008/2009 and outlined the background, purpose and intentions of the plan for advice and consideration by the Committee and introduced Chief Inspector Aidan Sloan of Northumbria Police to the Committee.

Councillor Gofton commented that in the current climate it must be difficult to reduce the fear of crime in residents and asked how this was being addressed. Mr. Kirk advised that it was one of the key priorities for the service and that they were tackling the issue in a number of ways , including:-

- working actively on a positive media strategy, providing stories about children and young people doing well, highlighting that 95% do not offend;
- involving and responding to local community needs through forums such as the LMAPS (Local Multi Agency Problem Solving) with partner agencies;
- working with previous victims of crime to bring together with those at risk of offending to give their experiences and influence; and
- working with the Safer Sunderland Partnership on positive promotion, including a film that had been produced by the Youth offending Service which is to be used in communities.

He agreed that it was a difficult issue to address but hoped that these and other projects would start to change public perceptions and reduce the fear of crime.

In response to a query from Mr. Snowdon regarding the victim / witness programme, Mr. Kirk advised that as part of the restorative justice system, for some offences the offer was put to victims to meet with offenders to discuss with them their experiences. Of those victims who had met with offenders the service had received a 100% satisfaction feedback. When asked how many of the offenders reoffended following the meeting, Mr. Kirk commented that he could provide the information as he did not have it to hand but he was aware that it had made a powerful impact.

Mr. Laverick welcomed the focus on prevention of young people offending and asked how those at risk of offending were identified by professionals. Mr. Kirk explained

that there were a number of different routes for a young person to come to the attention of the service but that once they had been identified an assessment of risk would be carried out which would highlight and devise a plan of action around the young person. Improvements were constantly being made to the system to link into as many partner agencies as possible which would then help in monitoring and following up on how effective the plan had been.

When asked how the Youth Offending Team was structured by Mr. Brown, Mr. Kirk explained that the Youth Offending Service was made up of 112 paid members of staff with strong representation in the service from volunteers, sessional workers, probation officers and partner agencies such as health, education and Connexions. He explained that some of their work included the prevention team that worked with people younger than 10 and those young people that were on reprimand or on a final warning. The ISSP (Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme) worked with young people who were at high risk of offending or prolific offenders and the resettlement team who helped those young people being released from custody.

Mr. Kirk informed the Committee that with regards to monitoring there was also a strong performance and planning team which was a challenging service to manage as it was constantly adapting and changing, but its aim was to ensure that the service was communicating effectively with all partners and agencies in a number of different ways.

Mr. Brown then asked how information was passed on between services when a young person turned 18 and became an adult, to which Mr. Kirk advised that the service worked with the probation and community safety teams to look at the transition of the young person to adulthood, which included issues such as housing options, health and risk and resilience. They were aware that this was a key area and there were improvements to be made to the process which was always being investigated.

In response to a query from Mrs. Burn regarding any work carried out with parents of young offenders, Mr. Kirk advised that there was a parenting strategy which was out for final consultation at present and there were a number of parent interventions supported and offered throughout the city. Ms. Hay explained that where parents were identified as an issue there was the option to go to court to make intervention work statutory for those parents to undertake.

Councillor Bell referred to the work of the LMAPS groups and commented that it may be beneficial for the Committee to have a presentation on the work of the group for those who were not aware of their multi-agency work and approach to local issues.

With regard to a query from Councillor Oliver concerning national BME targets and the position in Sunderland, Mr. Kirk explained that there was approximately 3% BME residents of the overall population in Sunderland and there were no concerns of higher ratios than this showing in the young offender's figures so this did not appear to be an issue in the city.

Ms. Hutchinson referred to the health worker vacancy and was advised that it had been a challenge to get the right person into the post for a number of reasons. Part

of the issue had been that the applicant would need to have a particular interest in wanting to work with young people but following discussion with the PCT, who had identified the remainder 50% of the funding, they had been able to offer a full time post shared between services. A service level agreement was developed in which the health service would deliver the service for the Council. Ms. Hay explained to Members that there was only a requirement to provide one health worker but the Council had decided to appoint two as they were fully committed to fulfilling their obligation as a service.

In response to a query from Ms. Carr regarding young offenders with learning disabilities, Mr. Kirk explained that the issue of learning disabilities in young offender was one which all youth offending teams were facing throughout the country. He advised that the service were working to ensure that those young people with learning difficulties were identified early when they made contact with them so that programmes could be adapted to suit their needs and but with some problems being so slight it could be a difficult process.

With regards to diversity, which was another question of Ms. Carr's, Mr. Kirk advised that they worked with the team who were responsible for dealing with hate or racially motivated crime carried out by young people to address these issues. Sunderland performs well in this area but the service was not complacent and was constantly aware of the issue and monitoring any cases.

Councillor Gofton referred to an old statistic that a high proportion of young offenders suffered from mild dyslexia which was not identified at the time and hoped that this was no longer the case now there were better means of identifying learning difficulties. Ms. Hay advised that addressing learning difficulties in young people was a priority in the Children and Young People's Plan and all young people were screened when taken into custody. School records were checked to identify any issues and the assessment process was screened to help in offering any support which an individual may need.

Councillor Kelly asked if children who were excluded from schools were automatically referred to the team and was advised not unless the Police had been involved in the incident which had resulted in the exclusion. Mr. Kirk explained that the young person may already be linked through the target youth support team. Any young person who was identified as possibly having any issues or concerns would be looked at to see if there was the need to build a support plan for them.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding the work undertaken with the magistrates Mr. Kirk advised that evaluation reports were prepared which highlighted how the recommendations made to the court matched those actually decided upon by the magistrate. Overall there was a generally good feedback of the courts being satisfied with the recommendations made and agreed upon. The service were constantly working with the magistrates and had developed good relationships with the magistrates with training being provided for them and a number of events being held which they attended.

The Chairman questioned the issues of staff turnover in the service and the impact it could have on delivering and was advised that the service had a loyal and committed

staff team that were used to working on a year to year funding basis. The service had been successful in securing following on funding and consistently looked at other funding streams which may be available to them as streams were coming to an end. This does bring challenges to the service but they ensured that they managed the budget within its boundaries and sought out new funding as and when required. Ms. Hay commented that the staff turnover levels in the section were extremely low.

The Chairman thanked Officers for their presentation and commented that it would be useful in future reports to the Committee to have an indication of where the service were, with regards to performance, alongside the risks and solutions that were identified in the strategy.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Committee support the Youth Justice Plan for 2008/2009 and the Council be recommended to approve the contents of the Plan.

Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the current position with regard to the PRU following inspection.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

5. RESOLVED that this report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee to allow full consideration of the item.

Ofsted Inspections – 12 Months Progress

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which invited Members to consider progress reports for Ofsted Inspection reports previously presented to the Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members having considered the report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the inspection progress update reports be received and noted.

Policy Review : Improving the Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health of Children and Young People

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) asking the Committee to approve the scope of the policy review to collect evidence relating to improving the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman referred to page 31 of the report relating to the Working Groups and their priorities and membership and advised that arrangements would soon be made for the first meeting of these groups to agree the scope of their review and the approach to investigating their topic.

Having given full consideration to the report and the topics within it, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the terms of reference for the policy review of emotional well-being and mental health be endorsed; and
- (ii) the membership and scope of the three working groups and the approach to investigating the topics be endorsed.

Policy Review Recommendations

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which gave Members the opportunity to review previous policy review recommendations and outcomes arising from major research projects undertaken by the Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman advised Members of the Committee that this report would be referred to the Director of Children's Services who would be requested to submit a further detailed report using the 'traffic light' system to show those any areas of concern.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the previous policy review of the Committee and the contribution to the delivery of the Council's strategic policy objectives in those areas be received and noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the opportunity to consider additional information for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Handbook.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

9. RESOLVED that, subject to any additions or amendments Members ask for, the proposed additions are incorporated into the Overview and Scrutiny Handbook.

Ofsted Inspections

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

- Easington Lane Primary School;
- Oxclose Village Primary School; and
- Grange Park Primary School.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members having considered the reports, it was:-

10. RESOLVED that the Ofsted Inspection reports be received and noted.

Consultations and Publications

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a summary of live government consultations and publications as follows:-

- School Admissions Consultation 2008;
- Children and Adoption Act 2006 – Children Act 1989 Contact Activity Directions and Conditions (Financial Assistance) (England) Regulations 2008;
- Byron Review Action Plan;
- Young Runaways Action Plan;
- The National Challenge – a toolkit for schools and local authorities; and
- Preventing violent extremism : A strategy for delivery.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

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

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.