

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the 2nd FLOOR MEETING ROOM, CITY LIBRARY AND ARTS CENTRE, FAWCETT STREET on THURSDAY, 10th DECEMBER, 2009 at 5.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, G. Hall, Snowdon and Tye together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. M. Harrop, Professor G. Holmes and Mrs. C. Hutchinson

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Francis, Kelly, T. Martin, Oliver and I. Richardson and on behalf of Mr. H. Brown, Mrs. D. Butler, Mr. M. Frank, Mrs. H. Kelly and Mr. D. Snowdon

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 12th November, 2009

The Committee's comments regarding the Young Persons Supported Housing Project had been submitted to Cabinet where they had been noted.

For information, Councillor Hall advised that residents in the area would be holding a public meeting and that a petition had been submitted to the meeting of the Full Council, with the planning application being expected to be heard during January 2010.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 12th November, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors G. Hall and Tye declared personal interests in Item 6 – Policy Review Recommendations Update : Achieving Educational Inclusion, April 2003

Library Services Pricing Review

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report which provided Members with the outline of a proposed review of the Culture and Tourism Fees and Charges Policy and sought views on the approach to be adopted.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Allison Clarke, Principal Librarian and Ms. Julie McCann, Performance and Resources Manager took Members through the report advising them of the actions that had already taken place to address immediate concerns that had been raised and of the planned next steps for the review to undertake. They explained that feedback from the results of the review would be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

Councillor Hall commented that the review was welcomed and reiterated that it was intended that this would add value to the services. He stated that it would be advisable for the Committee to scrutinise the proposed price changes prior to them being agreed and asked for a timescale on a report coming back to the Committee. Ms. Clarke advised that it was their intention to bring a report back to the January meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman commented that it was good that the library service had picked up on the main areas of concern and given some clarity to users of the facilities. He looked forward to receiving the report at the January meeting.

The Chairman referred to a working group the Committee were holding on the 4th January which the report may want to feed in to before the actual Committee and Ms. Clarke stated that they would aim to have a draft report ready for that group.

2. RESOLVED that Members comments on the proposed review be noted and a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee, following a draft report being submitted to the working group to be held on 4th January, 2010.

Development of a Sunderland Behaviour and Attendance Strategy

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the development of a Behaviour and Attendance Strategy for Sunderland and the opportunity for consultation.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Phil Hayden, Extended Services and Attendance Manager and Ms. Angela Noble, Headteacher – Pupil Referral Unit, gave a presentation to Members which set out the purpose and principles of the strategy as well as the key outcomes and priorities which would be targeted by the strategy.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

Mr. Hayden went on to present Members with a consultation exercise asking them to review the principles in the draft strategy and suggest any amendments or additions they may wish to have considered for inclusion.

Professor Holmes didn't disagree with any of the principles but felt that it may be difficult to measure the improvements made by this strategy alone as other agencies were working on the same area. He commented that it may be an idea to refine the indicators in a way which could reflect on how the strategy was making a difference itself. Mr. Hayden advised that they were making sure that the targets and measures were sharp and that national indicators would be contributing to outcomes but results would be looked at in more depth.

Councillor Stewart agreed that the principles could not be argued with but felt that it was important to then see how improvements were made at the action plan level. Having children stay on roll at schools and providing PDP's were good but there was a need for more detail and flexibilities to improve schools provision and support.

Ms. Noble commented that there were standard partnership agreements for 14-19 year olds which they were currently getting up and running and that they were looking at relationships with schools in each locality around the city. Ms. Lynda Brown advised that Head teachers were looking at making local partnerships and using the tools made available to them to target and re-engage young people.

Councillor Hall commented that he had been made aware that one of the problems Head Teachers faced with young people from an ethnic background was when they went away for long term holidays to visit extended family and asked how it was intended to get in touch with hard to reach groups and support them in explaining the importance of remaining in school during term time.

Ms. Lynda Brown advised that at present the figures did not show black, minority, ethnic groups being an issue as the majority of persistent absentees were white children. Mr. Hayden added that a piece of work had been started to help address the problem by any young person who has significant continual absences over a length of time being highlighted for action and monitored. They were sharing best practice and lessons learned with other authorities around the country to provide the best service possible.

Ms. Noble then went on to present Members with the second of three consultation exercises asking them to review the offer for children and young people as an entitlement, suggesting if Members felt this was right or if not, what else should be considered. Mr. Hayden suggested that members look at the entitlement as though they were a young person and think if it was the right entitlement.

Councillor Stewart commented that he felt young people would want to deal with one key person and not representatives from each agency they were involved with. He suggested possibly a contact in their School or a Local Authority Officer once they were of school leavers age.

Mrs. Harrop raised concerns over having the resources to support the expected provision in light of the current economic climate and was informed by Ms. Brown that the local authority had a statutory right to provide these and that most were already in place and happening and that they worked across the partnerships to ensure provisions were being made. Ms. Noble commented that they were also sharing good practice that was already in place and Head Teachers were responsive to sharing a 'pool' of resources in their locality.

In response to a query from Ms. Hutchinson regarding a programme for children who were disengaged with their school but quite bright or talented, Ms. Noble advised that they had Gifted and Talented Coordinators but they would try to look at the underlying reasons behind the young people not wanting to be involved. This would be part of the normal assessment process.

With regard to children with multiple or complex needs, Mr. Hayden advised that each young person would be assessed individually and the relevant support package be developed to best meet that child's needs.

Councillor Hall commented that there were varying categories of young people with a range of issues to communicate and queried the validity of the feedback to shape the strategy to address all. Ms. Noble commented that they had engaged and consulted with some young people and would be consulting with more and using the partnerships to help consult harder to reach groups.

Ms. Noble then presented the Committee with the third consultation exercise asking them to review the principles in the draft strategy and suggest any amendments or additions to them they may wish to have considered for inclusion.

Councillor Stewart commented that he was interested in the number of permanent exclusions from schools in the city and Ms. Lynda Brown advised that she did not have the figures to hand but would gather the information and email them to him.

Councillor Bell referred to the target to improve the number of schools as judged as good or better for behaviour by Ofsted and commented that some schools in the city catered specifically for young people with behavioural problems and asked how they could be better judged as it could differ depending on the nature of the pupils on the day Ofsted came to visit.

Ms. Noble advised that it was how to get the individual young person back on track as soon as possible and that inspectors would not be looking at the classroom environment only but at records such as the number of fixed and permanent exclusions and the data surrounding incidents to put support in place to reduce them.

In response to a further question from Councillor Bell regarding allowances being made for schools where children were placed because of bad behaviour, Ms. Lynda Brown advised that Springwell School had examples of good practice. The Inspector would look at the strategies and techniques in place and the youngsters that they catered for.

Councillor Hall sought clarification that the level of absenteeism by a young person had to reach 20% before any intervention process was started and was advised that the schools have a responsibility to maintain good attendance by pupils and when an absentee hits 20%, additional support from the Local Authority would step in. Schools did monitor absentees and those that showed any potential of hitting the 20% would often be highlighted beforehand, which could see the schools intervening themselves at around 15%.

Councillor Hall commented that 15% was still quite high and felt that targets should be possibly be reviewed to tighten them up further. Mr. Hayden advised that many schools would intervene well before the target but that the issue was in hand for the partnership to consider further.

Councillor Hall referred to the amount of school days missed by pupils due to them taking holidays during term time because they cost less. Mr. Hayden explained that as an authority they had worked closely with travel companies to address this but it was a national problem and costing was due to the market place at that time and could not always be reduced. He advised that the partnership were considering a zero tolerance approach to term time absence. Councillor Stewart felt that the only way he could see to possibly address this would be to stagger the school holidays. He also stated that there had to be clarity over the approach to term time holidays and consistency throughout all the schools in the city.

Mr. Hayden advised that the issue needed wider discussion with the partnership and families and that an audit of authorised absences would show any patterns in schools. He informed Members that the authority would be unable to enforce court action if a school had condoned absences for the pupil.

Finally, Mr. Hayden asked how the Committee would like to be involved in the review of the strategy action plan and outcomes and the Chairman suggested that a draft of the review be submitted to the working group the Committee were holding on the 4th January, which could then be fed back to the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman having thanked the Officers for their report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted, including the timescale for consultation and that the Committee's comments and views discussed be included as part of the consultation process and that a draft of the review be submitted to the working group of the Committee to be held on 4th January, 2010.

Policy Review Recommendations Update : Achieving Educational Inclusion, April 2003

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members of the Committee on the progress arising from the recommendation contained within the 2003 Policy Review on Achieving Educational Inclusion.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Lynda Brown, Head of Standards, presented the report to Members advising that the Directorates commitment to educational inclusion had not changed but that the actions around it had and that it was hoped that progress would continue to be made. She also advised that the SEN had been subject to a review and the Committee may wish to see the results of this at a future meeting.

Councillor Stewart noted that there had been significant progress made over the years since the policy review had been held which showed in the major difference presently in relation to the support provided by the service.

He then referred to recommendation 12, regarding discipline committees for pupils out of school enabling governors to have a monitoring role being identified as having yet to be developed and asked for an update. Ms. Brown advised that the mechanisms and monitoring were in place and being carried out with a zero tolerance on informal exclusions now.

Councillor Stewart went on to ask if there were many complaints from parents direct to the Council, which Ms. Brown informed Members rarely occurred. Any complaints received were usually regarding bullying but in the first instance the school would normally have dealt with any parent complaints.

He referred to recommendation 30 and voluntary sector provision and the development of the quality assurance framework, asking for further detail and Ms. Brown advised that a presentation was to be given on the 6th January, 2010 informing providers that 14-19 learning could not be given unless they had achieved the Silver Quality Assurance Award. She informed Members that there was an issue at the moment around ensuring that a qualified learning provider had safeguarding procedures in place and they were having to review the framework to include safeguarding. Ms. Jane Hedley, Senior Solicitor, advised that the Safeguarding Board had had some discussion around this issue. Councillor Stewart asked that Members of the Committee be provided with further information as the framework developed.

Councillor Hall referred to learning provision outside of the curriculum which he had been involved in such as the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, which has helped to mentor and reengage some young people back into mainstream education, and felt that there was an argument for continuing to provide this in the same way as it was not seen as an academic activity to some young people. Ms. Brown commented that if the scheme was part of the package being delivered for that individual young person than the organisation providing it should have the quality assurance award. The Head Teacher partnership was keen to have this framework in place so that they could have confidence in the provider and ensure parents alike were reassured.

4. RESOLVED that the progress being made on the recommendations from the Policy Review : Services for Children in Care be noted and that further progress updates on the recommendations and Quality Assurance Framework be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

Progress Report on Hylton Red House Primary School

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating the Committee on activity and progress at Hylton Red House Primary School that is subject to 'special measures' through an Ofsted judgement.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that no formal judgement following the fourth monitoring inspection had been received yet but the service had provisionally been advised that it was very positive in every area, with the school making satisfactory progress. They had commented on the improvements to the curriculum and to engaging and monitoring of pupils, feeling like there was a real enthusiastic atmosphere at the school. A detailed report would be submitted to the Committee once the final inspection report had been received.

Professor Holmes felt that the model used by the authority had shown a real test of the service in getting the level of culture change within the school and expected that it had come at a cost. Councillor Stewart shared his views and felt it should be noted how well staff and the school had undertaken processes to continue improving the Ofsted judgement at the school.

Councillor Stewart also asked that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on the work of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and how they had helped in making the turnaround at the school. The Officer agreed to bring back a further report showing how the roles of the IEB members were set up and the impact they had had.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted for information and a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on the roles and work of the IEB.

Ofsted Inspections – 12 Months Progress

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) inviting Members to consider progress in schools following Ofsted Inspection reports carried out approximately 12 months ago.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

In response to a query from Councillor Stewart regarding staff absences at Wessington Primary School he was advised that the member of staff was now back at work and that a teacher had been seconded from another school who was giving additional support.

6. RESOLVED that the progress in recently inspected establishments be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 December 2009 – 31 March 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 December 2009 – 31 March 2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the Executive's Forward Plan for the current period be received and noted.

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)

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

Resignation and Appointment of Co-opted Members

The Committee was advised that Mr. D. Snowdon had resigned as a Voting representative on the Committee as he was no longer a Parent Governor of a Local Authority School and Ms. K. Brown advised that Ms. H. Kelly had recently been appointed by Council to the Committee as a Parent Governor Voting Representative and the new vacancy would be advertised accordingly.

9. RESOLVED that the resignation and appointment be noted and the vacancy for a parent governor voting representative be advertised.

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.