

At a meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 17th APRIL, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Williams and D. Wilson together with Mrs. P. Burn, Ms. M. Carr, Mrs. C. Hutchinson, Ms. A. Johnson and Mr. D. Snowdon

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Bell, A. Cuthbert, P. Dixon, Fletcher, C. Gofton, G. Miller, Oliver and J. Walker together with those from Mr. M. Frank and Mr. A. Pearce

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on the 13th March, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Mr. Snowdon declared a personal interest in Item 4, Policy Review : Multi-Agency Approaches to Youth Disorder – Final Draft Report as a Board Director of Gentoo and as Secretary of the Washington Millennium Centre. He also declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Children's Centres as his wife was a governor at Wessington Primary School.

Councillor Williams declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Children's Centres as Chairman of the Early Years Strategic Partnership.

Councillor Stewart declared a personal interest in Item 12 – Ofsted Inspections as a Council appointed Governor of St John Bosco RC Voluntary Aided School.

Policy Review: Multi-Agency Approaches to Youth Disorder – Draft Final Report

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) inviting the Committee to endorse the draft final report following evaluation of multi-agency approaches to youth disorder.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman presented the report advising Members that any queries or additions they had to the draft report could be forwarded to the Review Coordinator for inclusion.

Members referred to the need to ensure the report was not just visionary and that the recommendations would be acted upon, particularly as there were opportunities available now in the city to deliver the recommendations, for example, in relation to provision of something for young people to do. Ms. Brown, Review Coordinator advised that developing the findings of the policy review following the endorsement of the recommendations from Cabinet was a crucial aspect of the report and actioning and monitoring would be included in next years work programme.

The Chairman commended the findings of the Committee and felt that this had been a useful investigation which would lead to service improvements. He advised that there were a lot of forward looking recommendations made to strengthen upon in the future which the Committee would monitor through its future work programme.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the draft final report be endorsed by the Committee and submitted to Cabinet as the Committee's proposals for review of policy.

Workforce Development and Human Resources Update

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress in relation to the workforce development strategy and action plan for the children's workforce in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Lynne Casey, Human Resource and Workforce Development Manager, presented the report advising that the Children's Trust had previously agreed a Workforce Development Strategy for services to young people in Sunderland, which was in line with national and local imperatives and included an annual action plan to secure the delivery of the key objectives.

In response to a query regarding job evaluation and support staff within from Councillor Williams, Ms. Casey advised that they had taken into account the regional picture when carrying out the job evaluation process and that they had found that some Local Authorities did not address the fact that some support staff were only contracted to term time hours whereas Sunderland had. She explained that the School Workforce Review Group was looking to progress developments further, particularly with regard to staff in secondary schools.

Councillor Wilson referred to section 8 of the report and commented that as part of the policy review, Members had found that some youth workers felt undervalued in their roles and asked if there was a possibility of looking at having their roles included within school structures and funding streams to give them long term, more secure contracts.

Mr. Snowdon referred to section 9.1 of the report and asked if there was any feedback on the stress questionnaire that the Children's Services Human Resources Team had introduced. Ms. Casey advised that it was too soon to see any feedback from the questionnaire results but informed Members that they would make up part of the review process to help in identifying triggers of stress and helping individuals return to work.

Ms. Hutchinson asked if there had been an increase in stress related absences by school staff and was informed that there had been a slight increase in the numbers recorded for long term absences but that the stress referred to in some cases was brought on by domestic issues and not work ones. The Committee also heard that a national agreement had been brought in to try and reduce workloads for teachers and staff within schools and that there had been an increase in support levels of staff in the classroom in Sunderland schools to help.

In response to a query from Ms. Johnson regarding social care views being included within the questionnaire, Ms. Casey explained that they had received a response from the Director and the questionnaire would now go to Senior Management Teams for delivery through focus groups, running parallel to the management standards of that section.

The Chairman referred to section 8.3 of the report and asked if any staff had requested to undertake the bursar qualification supported by the Training and Development Agency. Ms. Casey advised that there had been a good response to the qualifications available to staff and that there had been a number of staff aspiring to take the bursar qualification.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Casey for her report and presentation and looked forward to receiving further reports updating the Committee of developments in the future.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the progress made against the Children's Workforce Development Strategy be noted and the Human Resources Update be received for information.

Performance Report – April – December 2007/08 Quarter 3

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a position statement regarding key performance indicators and risk areas across the Council for the period April to December 2007 (Quarter 3).

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Norma Hardy, Head of Performance Improvement and Policy and Mr. Keith Moore, Deputy Director of Children's Services presented the report advising that this was the second performance report relating to the period April 2007 to December 2007 which provided a summary of individual performance indicators for each service area.

Councillor Wilson commented on employment opportunities for young people and that it was disheartening for some who attended Government training courses but then did not get jobs at the end of them. Ms. Hardy responded that they were aware of the percentage of young people in employment, education and training and those that were not and that services worked with people on an individual basis to help get them in employment or training. She advised Members that Judith Hay, Head of Positive Contribution and Economic Well Being, was compiling a comprehensive assessment on all young people and their status.

In response to a query from Ms. Carr regarding getting disabled young people into employment, education or training, Ms. Hardy advised the Committee that the Council continued to work with young disabled people to place them in positions of employment or training. Ms. Lynda Brown, Head of Standards, informed Members that the 14-19 partnership were redrafting their plan and looking at ways to join up services and provision for young disabled people to ensure they got the support they required.

Ms. Hutchinson commented that there used to be a target for the Council to employ a number of people with disabilities and Ms. Casey advised that these did still exist as part of the equality and diversity plan for the Council but that it did not set out exact figures for the number of people that should be employed. Ms. Jane Hedley, Senior Solicitor advised that this was not a statutory requirement any longer but that it was included under the Best Value Performance Indicators.

The Chairman referred to the 19 indicators on target and asked how this compared with 2006/07 which Ms. Hardy agreed to provide information on. He also asked that the information include details of how many of the indicators not being met were in the 'declining' trend.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted as part of the quarterly monitoring arrangements.

Progress on Development of Management Information for Children's Centres

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided further information for the Committee on data collection and analysis to demonstrate the effectiveness of Children's Centres.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Snowdon commented on the good work that was been undertaken by the Children's Centres and expressed concerns over the possibility of services being withdrawn in the future due to budget constraints. Mr. Hayden stated that in particular with childcare arrangements within Children's Centres there were issues of ensuring that the most vulnerable groups were accessing the provision available to them.

Mr. Snowdon went on to say that a lot of the benefits from the work done within the Children's Centres would not be recognised until the child was of school age and it was picked up then in targets and outcomes. Mr. Hayden explained that schools were using the start in the Children's Centres to set a benchmark for the work that was being carried out with those under three years old.

The Chairman asked what percentage of the target population the centres were reaching and would be expected to reach in future years and was informed that there was more of a focus on the quality of contribution to lives the centres could make to families rather than a percentage target. On face value the percentage would appear low but it should be taken in the context that the centres had increased from 7 sure start facilities to 17 Children's Centres, which had increased participation by vulnerable and hard to reach groups within communities. Now that the service had baseline figures recorded they could be used to monitor increases in participation.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the progress on development of management information for Children's Centres be received and noted.

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.

Annual Report of the Children's Services Review Committee 2007/08

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented a summary of the work of the Review Committee during 2007-08 which would be submitted to Council in June 2008, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members having considered the reports, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the Committee considered the operation, achievement and impact of the Committee during 2007-08 and that the report be submitted to Council.

Annual Performance Assessment 2008

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the APA arrangements for 2008, following concerns raised by Members at the March meeting.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members having considered the reports it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and a draft of the self-assessment be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Children and Young People's Participation Strategy

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) presenting the first draft of the proposed Children and Young People's Participation Strategy.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman advised Members of the Committee that he had received a request from a Member of the Committee for information on this item.

In response to the query from Ms. Hutchinson regarding the definition of participation of young people, Ms. Hardy explained that the report identified how young people had been involved during the consultation period and how it would then be disseminated to all young people in the city.

Ms. Hutchinson also commented that it may be appropriate to include within the strategy that support could be given to young people on occasions when things did go wrong or it was needed.

She also referred to the fact that Northumbria Police had a number of diversionary tactics and projects in place which had not been included in the strategy document. Ms. Hardy advised that the strategy had been built upon the good practices undertaken by the Youth Development Group and the relationships they had with other partnerships. She also agreed that more emphasis could be given on how to engage the 5% of young people in the city who did offend and agreed to take the Committee's comments on board.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

9. RESOLVED that the first draft of the proposed Children and Young People's Participation Strategy be received and noted and the consultation timetable be agreed.

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:-

- St John Bosco RC;
- Southwick Primary;
- Diamond Hall Junior;
- Seaburn Dene;
- St Cuthbert's RC Primary;
- Hylton Red House; and
- Dubmire Primary.

(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:-

- Assessing the Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing – A Call for Evidence;
- Statutory Guidance for Children's Trusts on the Duty to Cooperate;
- Fair Play : A consultation on the play strategy. A commitment in The Children's Plan;
- Promoting achievement, valuing success : a strategy for 14-19 qualifications;
- Consultation on Draft Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulations 2008;
- Review of Mathematics Teaching in Early Years Settings and Primary Schools : INTERIM REPORT;

- Consultation to Draft School Admissions (Alteration and Variation of, and Objections to, Arrangements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008;
- Raising Expectations : enabling the system to deliver;
- The Government's response to coroners' recommendations following the inquests of Gareth Myatt and Adam Rickwood;
- Updated Child Health Promotion Programme : Pregnancy and the first five years of life;
- The Dance Review and other related documents; and
- Young people : leading change.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

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

Action Plan for Scrutiny

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) to bring to the Committee current information monitoring delivery of the Action Plan for Scrutiny 2007/08.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

12. RESOLVED that in considering the actions taken to date towards meeting the Objectives of the Action Plan, Members' identify any areas of underperformance and indicate what further action they intend to take or require to be taken by officers.

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

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.