

At a meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 12th JUNE, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Kelly, Paul Maddison, Morrissey, Oliver, Snowdon, L. Walton and D. Wilson together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. D. Butler, Mrs. M. Harrop, Mrs. C. Hutchinson, Mr. A. Pearce and Mr. D. Snowdon

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of Policy and Coordination Review Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Gofton together with those from Mr. H. Brown, Ms. M. Carr, Professor G. Holmes and Mr. S. Laverick

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.

Chairman's Announcement

The Chairman welcomed new Members to the Committee and advised that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Pat Smith would be invited to attend the Committee on a termly basis to inform the Committee of progress in relation to corporate improvement objectives. He informed Members that Councillor Smith had been invited to the next meeting of the Committee to give the first of these briefings.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Stewart declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Ofsted Inspections – 12 Months Progress as a Council appointed Governor of Witherwack Primary School.

Change in Order of Business

At this juncture the Chairman asked that Item 9 'Policy review – Multi-Agency Approaches to Youth Disorder and Item 10 'Terms of Reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees' be heard first on the agenda in line with the Council's Constitution.

Policy Review: Multi-Agency Approaches to Youth Disorder

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 28th May, 2008, where it had considered the Review Committee's Policy Review, 'Multi-Agency Approaches to Youth Disorder'.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members having considered the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the response of the Cabinet on the Policy Review of Multi-Agency Approaches to Youth Disorder be received and noted.

Terms of Reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the opportunity to consider proposals on the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees considered at Cabinet.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members having considered the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that the proposals as set out in the report be welcomed at the next meeting of the full Council.

Integrated Youth Strategy 2008-2011 : Consultation Document

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the Draft Sunderland Integrated Youth Strategy 2008 – 2011 and the associated consultation process.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Keith Moore, Deputy Director of Children's Services gave a presentation to the Committee on the strategy and advised of key achievements and challenges of the service targeting youth support. He informed the Committee that the draft strategy was out for consultation for the next two to three month and any comments Members had could be fed into this process.

In response to a question from Councillor Oliver regarding how the proposals would tie in with the work the Area Committee already undertake in helping youth support through SIB grants, Mr. Moore advised that as part of the consultation process they would be taking the draft strategy to each of the Area Committees for their views and input. This process would help identify how the likes of SIB funding would fit into the overall strategy and future developments.

Mr. Snowdon asked if the Council had the numbers of skilled workers needed to provide the proposed services and was advised that the Youth Development Group had a training strategy and were responsible for training all youth workers within the city up to NVQ Level 3. All volunteers within the city were trained to a high standard also and there were currently 66 workers enrolled on training courses. Sunderland has the highest pass rate in the region of 86%.

Mr. Snowdon then went on to ask if the Council would have enough staff members to carry out the proposals within the strategy and Ms. Kath Butchert, Youth Integrated Officer explained that they were continuing to work to recruit and retain staff as best as possible but there was a national shortage. The Youth Development Group were providing a Detached Youth Worker Course to help to train staff with the skills required of youth workers and go on to help in driving forward the final strategy.

In response to a query from Councillor Snowdon regarding the Empowering Young People Pilot and the 'Let's Go' Card, Ms. Butchert informed the Committee that there were 2,200 young people, in the city, eligible for the card. City schools were supporting the pilot and there were currently in the region of 1,500 young people signed up to the pilot scheme. When asked if this could have an impact on the take up of free school meals, Ms. Butchert confirmed that the scheme could have a 'knock-on' effect on the numbers.

Mrs. Burn commented on weekend provision of detached youth workers and asked, of the 66 trainees, how many had agreed or could possibly be utilised to work Friday and Saturday evenings. Ms. Butchert explained that weekend provision had been identified as an issue and was raised in the policy review which had been undertaken by the Committee. The service were working with neighbourhood projects to make providing activities on a Friday and Saturday evening more attractive to staff and from the 1st July, 2008 a pilot Mobile Youth Village would be operating from 6.00pm to 10.00pm on a Friday and Saturday which may help address problems. Mr. Moore advised that the service needed to use the model for commissioning so that agencies agreed to provide weekend youth provision.

The Chairman asked a question in relation to Capital Grants and Funding and asked how they were used. Ms. Butchert advised that they had to be spent on positive activities for young people, which was stated in the contract between the Council and the agency. It was made clear to providers that some focus should be put on providing weekend and holiday provision.

In response to a further request from the Chairman that Area Committees be consulted, to give their priorities for youth provision in their relative areas, Mr. Moore advised that through a similar presentation to each of the Area Committees they would raise the issue and seek feedback.

Mrs. Butler referred to page 20 of the Consultation document and the production of a central directory of places to go and things to do and asked how people were made aware of this and could gain access to it. Ms. Butchert advised that the directory had been started and was launched via a web site which young people had tested and given their thoughts upon. Young people, parents and practitioners would be given details of the site and encouraged to use it and give their views. In the next two weeks a marketing campaign was going to be launched promoting the directory and posters would be displayed in schools and libraries throughout the city. Hard to reach groups would be targeted through youth support schemes and partner agencies that were currently engaged to work with them.

The Chairman queried the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds and the majority of young people who would benefit from them and was advised by Ms. Butchert that Youth Matters Team had carried out an audit recently of the projects and areas which had received funding and were now identifying gaps in youth provision which needed targeting.

The Chairman then referred to page 30, paragraph 3 of the consultation document and the reduction areas and commented that it may have been more beneficial to see targets and expectations of what the service wanted to achieve and the steps to reach it. Ms. Butchert explained that this year they would be identifying the base line information to establish the performance framework and targets for future years.

The Chairman thanked Officers for their presentation and commented that the Committee would look forward to receiving a further update following the consultation findings.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Committee support the Integrated Youth Strategy 2008 to 2011 Consultation Document and the associated consultation process.

Risk and Resilience Strategies

Ms. Janette Sherratt, Head of Health Improvement gave Members a presentation and draft of the Risk and Resilience Strategy (copies circulated).

(for copy presentation and report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sherratt took Members through the presentation advising of the vision and scope of the draft strategy and informing the Committee of the key approaches to the core offer of the Risk and Resilience Strategy in line with national policy and guidance.

Ms. Sherratt informed Members that she was happy to receive any comments on the draft strategy and would submit a further report to a future meeting of the Committee following the consultation process.

Mrs. Butler referred to page 36 of the draft strategy and queried that there was only one young person's clinic available in the Washington and Hetton areas. Ms. Sherratt advised that provision had been mapped and plotted out giving a core offer to each area of the city. At present there was a significant gap in certain areas of the city but they had addressed those areas which had been identified as needing provision more urgently first.

In response to a query from Mr. Snowden regarding young people being referred or treated within 5-10 working days being too long, Ms. Sherratt advised that this was the maximum time any young person should wait. Individual cases were obviously prioritised with the most urgent cases being seen significantly quicker if needed.

The Chairman referred to the Director of Public Health and the Director of Children's Services being identified as champions for the strategy and asked how the service were intending to interest children in it. Ms. Sherratt advised that a senior level of input was required for the strategy but that they had also identified key strands and skills to allow young people to make their own positive lifestyle choices. Previously, the emphasis had been on providing more fact based information, whereas now the focus had been shifted to help young people recognise skills based on their own Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). Ms. Sherratt explained that young people were being taught how to recognise and negotiate risk and make their own choices in life.

In response to a further question from the Chairman regarding how the need for individual youth support was identified and then targeted for funding, Mr. Moore advised that it related to information detailed in the previous items' presentation, using the Targeted Youth Support Group. He explained that there would always be the issue of public perception, and identifying when youths in an area have become a significant problem. The service would then need to ensure that resources are applied in that area to engage with young people and provide the facilities for them to give alternatives which they would want to use.

The Chairman, having clarified that the draft strategy was being issued for consultation in July, asked that the Review Coordinator write to Members of the Committee seeking their views to be included.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the presentation be received and noted and any comments on the draft Risk and Resilience Strategy be forwarded to the Review Coordinator for inclusion in the consultation process.

Annual Review of the Children and Young Peoples Plan and Annual Performance Assessment 2008

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the progress being made in completing the second annual review of the Children and Young People's Plan 2006-09 and in putting together a self assessment to submit as part of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for 2008.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Norma Hardy, Head of Performance Improvement and Policy, presented the report advising the Committee that early versions of the annual review were available for Members to comment upon by 20 June, 2008. The Chairman requested that members forward any comments to the Review Coordinator so that a full Committee response could be submitted.

The Chairman referred to the APA self assessment and the 'Staying Safe' grading of 3 and asked if the findings of the Ofsted Inspections at St Aidan's and the Children's Homes, as detailed later in the agenda, would have any effect on this. Ms. Hardy explained that the report on the agenda outlined the situation with regard to the Children's Homes and that solutions were being put in place and they were expecting a reassessment which would improve the Ofsted findings.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the draft of the 2007/08 annual review of the Children and Young People's Plan be received and noted and any comments be forwarded to the Review Coordinator by 20 June, 2008;
- (ii) the draft of the 2008 self assessment for submission as part of the APA process be received and noted and any comments be forwarded to the review Coordinator by 20 June, 2008; and
- (iii) the proposed set of self evaluation grades 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).

The Chairman asked how St Robert of Newminster had resolved the issue of improving the consistency of academic guidance in the sixth form. Ms. Lynda Brown, Head of Standards, explained that St Robert's had been disappointed in the Inspection outcome given that the school has such a good level of consistent achievement and had challenged the findings. The school were working with the independent advisers at the Connexions service to support school staff to identify any areas that may need addressing.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

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

Annual Work Programme and Policy Review 2007/08

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) to determine the Annual Work Programme for the Review Committee during 2008/09, including the main theme for a detailed policy review.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Karen Brown, Review Co-ordinator, advised that the Work Programme was flexible and items could be added during the year. She also brought Members' attention to the three possible topics to be considered as a review topic for 2008/09 and the six possible topics to be considered as individual Task and Finish Groups, if it was felt necessary.

Mr. Les Platt, Senior Community Relations Officer, attended the meeting and briefed the Committee on the findings of the MORI survey in relation to equalities and the remit of the Children's Services Directorate. He requested that these be taken into consideration when discussing future report topics.

The Chairman took Members through each of the suggested review and task and finish group topics, inviting Members' views and opinions on each.

Councillor Snowden referred to the Children's Centres / Extended Schools topic and indicated that it may be bigger than a single report item as not one model fits all requirements for each Centre. The Chairman suggested this could take the format of a day's visit and discussion of the Children's Centres with the issue being highlighted in next year's work programme if it remained a high priority.

Councillor Oliver referred to the possible review topic of tackling child poverty and felt that this issue was of a more imminent relevance than the other options. The Chairman suggested this could be tied into a number of other reports to be submitted to the Committee as single scrutiny items or take the format of a task and finish group if it was felt necessary.

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

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the work programme be endorsed and submitted to Policy and Coordination Review Committee for an overview of Review Committee business;
- (ii) the Committee undertake an in depth review on 'Emotional Health of Children & Young People';
- (iii) the Committee hold a 'theme' meeting and visit to hold a smaller review of 'Children's Centres / Extended Schools'; and
- (iv) the Review Coordinator write to all Members of the Committee seeking their interest in the Task and Finish Groups as set out in the report.

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 Patrick's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School;
- Oxclose Community School;
- St Joseph's Washington RC School; and
- Mill Hill Nursery School.

(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.

Councillor Oliver sought further information on the inspection of Oxclose Community School with regard to the previous inspection grades and the standard and quality of teaching / learning at Key Stage 3 as referred to in the report. Ms. Sue Morgan, Senior School Improvement Officer agreed to collate the information requested and circulate it to Members of the Committee.

Members having considered the reports, it was:-

9. RESOLVED that the Ofsted Inspection reports be received and noted and the further information as requested be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

Ofsted Inspections of Children's Homes

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report (copy circulated) which invited Members to consider the judgements and Ofsted inspection reports of the seven mainstream homes, the short break unit for children with disabilities and the home for children with disabilities, in Sunderland.

(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.

Councillor Oliver referred to the fact that there had been a lot of positive comments of the Children's Homes but that three of them had been judged as 'Inadequate' due to the no of children in the home exceeding the limit assigned to them and asked if the Council had a policy in place to address this. Mr. Mick McCracken, Head of Safeguarding, advised that each children's home was registered to accept a certain number of children at any one time and that it had been custom practice for the home to exceed this number in a time of emergency when a vulnerable young person needed accommodation.

Previous regimes had accepted that this situation could occur occasionally but in this year's inspections Ofsted had been stricter and where the limit had been exceeded the home had been deemed as inadequate under the 'staying safe' or 'organisational management' criteria, with an overall judgement of inadequate.

Since February, 2008 it had been made clear to children's homes that registered numbers needed to be adhered to at all times. A request had been made to have the homes that were affected inspected again and the service was confident the overall judgement would improve.

Councillor Bell commented that children's home had previously had a spare room to be used for emergency cases and asked if this was still available. Mr. McCracken explained that if a home wished to be registered to accept emergency children a room had to be specifically allocated for that purpose.

In response to a further query as to how foster carers could deal with emergency placements, Mr. McCracken some foster care workers in Sunderland were paid to take in emergency placements or challenging children and support was provided to help those workers through training and providing links for them. There is an emphasis on increasing the number of foster carers within the city so that some of the challenging children currently residing in children's homes could be better placed with families.

The Chairman referred to the inspections of Monument View and Williamson Terrace and the fact that standard checks were not being carried out. The Committee were informed that Regulation 33 visits were carried out every month and the documentation was monitored to ensure all the relevant checks were carried out. Children's Homes have registered managers and one of their duties was to ensure the current checks and supporting documents were maintained.

Members having considered the reports, it was:-

10. RESOLVED that the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Home be received and noted and re-inspection reports be received as they become available.

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:-

- Youth Alcohol Action Plan;
- Fair Play : A consultation on the play strategy. A commitment in The Children's Plan;
- Consultation on proposals relating to the commencement of section 37 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 – staffing at foundation and voluntary schools with a religious character;

- Consultation on introducing provisional registration with the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) for trainee teachers, unqualified teachers and instructors;
- The CAMHS Review – next Steps to Improving the Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health of Children and Young People. Call for Evidence;
- The Management of Building Schools for the Future waves 7 to 15;
- Assessing the Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing – A Call for evidence (Interested Parties Version)
- Statutory Guidance for Children's Trusts on the Duty to Cooperate;
- The Future of Tobacco Control;
- Joint Birth registration : Recording Responsibility;
- Back on Track : A Strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people;
- Departmental report 2008; and
- Promoting achievement, valuing success : a strategy for 14-19 qualifications.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman asked that the Review Coordinator circulate the documentation in relation to the consultation on the Youth Alcohol Action Plan to all Members of the Committee for their views. Ms. Brown would then submit a response from the Committee based on the information received.

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.