

At a meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 9TH OCTOBER, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bell, P. Dixon, Gofton, P. Maddison, Oliver, Snowdon, L. Walton, D. Wilson, together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. D. Butler, Mrs. M. Harrop and Mr. D. Snowdon.

Apologies for Absence

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

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations received.

Change in Order of Business

At this juncture the Chairman asked that Item 7 – 'Anti-Racism Strategy' be heard first on the agenda.

Anti-Racism Strategy

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating the Committee on the work of the Tackling Racism Group, following a verbal report earlier in the year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Lynda Brown, Head of Standards was in attendance, accompanied by Lesley Spuhler, SAFC Foundation and Trevor Harvey, Thornhill School.

Mr. Harvey advised Members that up until his retirement from Thornhill School, he held the position of Personal Social Health Education Advisor (PSHE), which required him to provide support and encouragement to a rap and hip-hop group based at the school called THE WORD.

THE WORD's mission was to address and promote issues relating to race, culture, religion and community cohesion. They had performed in excess of one hundred and fifty concerts throughout the North East, including two hugely successful shows at Sunderland Empire Theatre. Shows covered a variety of issues and were sometimes split into three parts, covering racism, religion and hopes and dreams. The group were willing to adapt their show according to the requirements of the audience and had in the past carried out workshops and talks on how to combat and overcome racism.

THE WORD had received praise from Ruth Kelly for its excellent work in trying to deliver such important messages and more recently had produced a portfolio of stimulus materials which tutors could use in schools. The idea of the portfolio was to spread the message that discrimination of any kind, such as racism and bullying could cause problems and to respect differences in all forms. Every secondary school in Sunderland had been provided with a copy with a copy of the portfolio which it was hoped would assist pupils overcome any negativity in relation to these issues.

Councillor Bell enquired whether there had been positive feedback so far. Mr. Harvey advised indeed there had been, and that Chester-le-Street District Council had even requested a copy of the portfolio.

Mr. Snowdon asked how was the initiative was going to be evaluated. Mr. Harvey explained that feedback would be obtained via the circulation of questionnaires.

Councillor Ball firstly congratulated Mr. Harvey on the success of THE WORD, however appreciated that there was still a long way yet to go, particularly as she was aware of occurrences in Millfield where children had met and then had been subjected to physical racial abuse.

In response to a query from Councillor Gofton regarding what measures were being used to assess the impact of the portfolio and when would it be considered a success. Mr. Harvey advised that the feedback received to date from schools and Head Teachers had been excellent. Audience participation had taken place in shows as well as question and answer sessions with young people which had all been incredibly positive.

Councillor Snowdon enquired whether the portfolio was available to primary schools as well as secondary schools. Mr. Harvey advised that the portfolio, lesson plans and the show were available to all children and young people aged between 4-18 years old and that very similar information had been sent to secondary and primary schools alike.

Councillor Bell commented that an increase in attendance at THE WORD's shows could be achieved if link officers positively marketed up and coming performances. Mr. Harvey stated that publicity would feature in the Head Teachers Termly next week. A website would also be available in the forthcoming weeks.

Mrs. P. Burn enquired whether steps had been taken to market THE WORD's success. In response, Mr. Harvey advised that articles had been placed in the Sunderland Echo. Work had also been undertaken with Sunderland AFC, Newcastle United Football Club and Manchester United Football Club to publicise materials and promote anti-racism messages.

Ms. Spuhler, from SAFC Foundation, then advised the Committee that in order to enhance the work already undertaken by the Football Club, they had decided to get involved with the Tackling Racism Steering Group alongside Children's Services. One of the outcomes of the Group was the creation of a marketing campaign, production of a poster to promote anti-racism. Copies of the poster and a marketing spreadsheet indicating the dates when campaigns would be run were circulated.

Ms Spuhler advised that further ways to market anti-racism included an advert in every match-day programme, an advert during the lead-up to Derby day, and on every match day. The Football Club were also looking into producing anti-racism slogans on a City postcard, bus advertisements, placemats, beer mats and Metro boards. The Steering Group agreed to run the campaign for a year and towards the end, evaluate it, via the circulation of a questionnaire during match days asking people: were the Football Club getting the message across, did it make people think differently etc. It was hoped that evaluation techniques would get more sophisticated as time progressed.

The Chairman enquired whether schools might have a lead teacher or champion to deal with anti-racism. In response, Lynda Brown, Head of Standards advised that this was an interesting idea and that it was an issue worth tackling, particularly in primary schools.

The Chairman enquired further regarding education in schools and in doing so, enquired whether schools would use THE WORD's portfolio or choose their own priorities. Mr. Harvey explained that THE WORD had appeared in various schools and due to the pupils having seen the show, schools based their learning on the portfolio.

Councillor Bell enquired whether the Sunderland AFC players themselves had been approached with regard to promoting anti-racism. Ms. Spuhler advised that the Club had avoided involving the players to publicise the issue directly as the marketing approach had been agreed from a City-wide perspective, not a Football Club perspective.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their informative report.

The Committee then,

2. RESOLVED to note the progress made to date with regard to materials for schools and the media campaign.

Integrated Youth Strategy/Review of Summer Youth Pilot

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) introducing the Committee to the consultation results of the Integrated Youth Strategy and Summer Youth Pilot – XL which were then presented by Judith Hay, Head of Positive Contribution and Economic Well-Being and Kath Butchert, Youth Integration Officer in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Butchert began the presentation by detailing the key features of the consultation exercise that had taken place between May to September 2008 on the Integrated Youth Strategy, which involved national and regional agencies.

She advised that excellent feedback had been received, particularly from the Department of Children and Young Families, who regarded Sunderland as one of the top performing Authorities in this work area. As a result, the London Borough of Croydon Council had specifically requested a copy of the Integrated Youth Strategy. Feedback from individuals and groups, including practitioners, Elected Members, the Children's Trust and the six Area Committees had also been very positive, especially from young people.

The Committee were then presented with information regarding the results of the exercise and also the key challenges that lay ahead, which were intended to form the final plan.

In closing her presentation she outlined next steps, which included:-

- informing those who participated in the consultation the outcomes of their feedback.
- to outline the proposed changes to the Strategy in response to the consultation.
- highlight issues and key challenges raised during the consultation process and how these may be resolved.
- ensure the Strategy reflects and links to key priorities in related plans and partnerships including the development of Local Area Plans.

Judith Hay supplied information to Members of the Committee on the Summer Positive Activities for Young People Pilot (XL) 2008. In referring specifically to the development of a Youth Village for Sunderland, she highlighted the aims of the event that had taken place during the summer and the programme that had been set. Photographs of the Youth Village were displayed in the presentation, as were the event outcomes and comments from young people who had attended.

Members of the Committee were advised that positive press coverage had been achieved following the event, particularly that fewer young people were hanging around the streets due to them having somewhere safe to go.

To hopefully continue with the success of the Youth Village, a Big Lottery Fund application had been submitted for a MyPlace bid to fund three state of the art Mobile Villages.

Councillor Bell suggested that may be the Mobile Villages could be promoted via LMAPS and the six Area Committees.

Councillor Gofton commented that she was impressed that the young people themselves had suggested using metal detectors and breath testing equipment prior to entry into the Mobile Village being granted.

Mrs. P. Burn commented that she was aware that some residents complained about the location that had been chosen to set up the Mobile Village. In response Ms. Hay stated that Officers in Children's Services personally visited some of the residents who had expressed concerns and they were assured that it would be safe and that Police would be on site.

Councillor Oliver thanked Children's Services for all their hard work and stated that residents in St. Chad's Ward and Farringdon Ward greatly appreciated the consultation exercises that had been carried out.

Councillor Oliver went on to describe a recent visit he had undertaken to the BOX Project in the Doxford Ward one Friday evening and commented that there were no young people there. He suggested that as a project in a permanent site was unused the mobile units could be the way forward. Ms. Hay appreciated Councillor Oliver's comments, adding that the mobile unit was also cheaper to run than a whole building. Nonetheless, the BOX Project was an excellent facility and was popular with young people, particularly during the winter months.

Mr. D. Snowdon stated that attracting good quality youth workers had been difficult for him in the past, therefore he was interested to learn how Children's Services had managed to secure so many. Ms. Hay advised that the pay for youth workers was increased by £2, which may have proved to be an incentive. Mr. Snowdon and Ms. Hay were to discuss this further outside of the meeting.

Councillor D. Wilson stated that it was pleasing to see that twenty-three out of twenty-five hard to reach groups were attracted to the Mobile Youth Village and that they remained in attendance. Conversely, it was disappointing to learn that some young people had been drinking alcohol which was the reason why they had not been able to access the Mobile Village. Aside from that, he felt the event was excellent.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Maddison regarding whether there was any reason why Grindon and Thorney Close had been chosen as the area to set up the Mobile Village, Ms. Hay advised because the area had one of the highest anti-social behaviour orders.

Councillor Snowdon enquired whether targets for young people had been met. In response, Ms. Butchert advised that targets had exceeded expectations due to the high aspirations of the young people.

Councillor Snowdon went onto query whether young people were steered towards using other youth provisions in the City following the event. Ms. Hay advised indeed they were, and that this could be traced. Councillor Snowdon expressed an interest in this information coming back to the Committee.

Councillor Gofton in referring to the event enquired where the successes lay. Ms. Hay responded advising that having obtained the views of multi-agencies and young people, officers were able to come to the conclusion that the Mobile Villages were successfully because they were innovative. Young people, aged between thirteen-seventeen particularly enjoyed it because to them it appeared to be very much like a festival, however it was still safe but still with the high energy vibe.

Councillor Bell commented that schools should be utilised more on an evening and that the Council's current resources should be maximised.

The Chairman commented that he could see the benefit of bidding for MyPlace funding if it was intended that the Mobile Villages would be open 52 weeks of the year, then he enquired how likely was it that Sunderland would be successful in their bid, and was this capital or revenue money. Ms. Hay advised that almost every Local Authority had applied for the funding, and depending on how many had applied in total and whether applications fulfil the relevant criteria would be the deciding factor. The Children's Services Directorate were hoping that the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) would support Sunderland City Council's bid. She went on to inform Members that a decision should be available in six weeks time and that the MyPlace funding would be 100% capital. Other funding streams were being researched, such as the Youth Opportunities Fund, LMAPS and SIB.

The Chairman enquired who would be involved with the Area Plans and at what stage were the Directorate currently at. Ms. Butchert responded advising that the Chief Executive's Directorate were leading on this issue and that a report on detailed area based statistics would be submitted to the Committee as soon as they become available.

The Chairman thanked Judith Hay and Kath Butchert for their presentations.

The Committee then,

3. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the findings from the consultation and XL Event; and
- (ii) note the ongoing work to secure the XL project in Sunderland.

Audit Commission and School Survey 2008

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members of the Committee with a high level summary of the 2008 Audit Commission School Survey results.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Norma Hardy, Head of Performance Improvement and Policy and Lynda Brown, Head of Standards were in attendance to present the report.

Ms. Hardy gave an introduction to the report and highlighted the background into the School Survey 2008.

Ms. Brown then advised Members of the current position and referred specifically to progress made since 2007, including risk indicators that had improved in 2008 and those which had not.

Mrs. Burn commented that the number of Surveys returned seemed disappointing, and enquired whether an incentive could be created for teachers to complete the questionnaire. Ms. Brown advised that the low response rate was due to the volume and type of questions contained within the questionnaire which had been set by the Audit Commission.

Mrs. Burn then asked why Sunderland Council referred to children in care as "Children Looked After". Mick McCracken, Head of Safeguarding explained that the term "Children Looked After" had been around since the 1990s, and covered those children subject to statutory care orders and those looked after by the Local Authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Unfortunately, there was very little that could be done due to the regulations, legislation and guidance that was in place. However, the term was a national descriptor and all Local Authorities were advised to use it.

Councillor Bell stated that the Survey results revealed issues that were not meeting teachers' requirements and that it was important that these come before the Committee although he appreciated that the report was useful, he felt that it was frustrating that teachers' perceptions could not be drilled into further.

Councillor Snowdon enquired whether Children's Services were aware which schools had responded and that it may prove useful to pass the questionnaires through to the Governing Bodies in order that they could monitor responses.

The Chairman agreed to consider writing to schools next year on behalf of the Review Committee, encouraging teachers to respond by explaining the value of the survey to the Committee. In the meantime, he suggested that may be the Schools Forum could be used to promote the questionnaire.

Ms. Hardy explained that a Head Teacher Briefing was scheduled to meet in the next week, and that the poor response rates would be fed back.

The Chairman stated that overall he was delighted with the report, particularly the good scores relating to being healthy and staying safe.

Members having considered the item:-

4. RESOLVED to receive and note the contents of the report.

Risk and Resilience Strategy

Janette Sherratt, Head of Health Improvement provided a verbal presentation to Members on the Risk and Resilience Strategy, including the types of interventions that Children's Services were planning.

Ms. Sherratt informed Members of various risk and resilience factors and risk taking behaviours. Then went on to outline the aims of the Strategy, which were as follows:-

To improve outcomes for children, young people and their families by providing effective, integrated services that:-

- Raise aspirations
- Promote resilience
- Support children and young people make positive lifestyle changes
- Address risk taking behaviours that impact upon
 - Sexual Health
 - Teenage Pregnancy
 - Substance Misuse
 - Smoking

Members were advised that in terms of strategy development, Children's Services had taken an evidence based approach by undertaking an audit of current provision, and that GAP analysis consultation had taken place on the draft Strategy. Local and national policy and legislation had also been taken into account.

Ms. Sherratt outlined the key features contained within the Strategy plus details regarding universal services, targeted populations and services for change through interventions such as the YOS, those in care and in specialist education, specialist services in terms of substance misuse, teenage pregnancy services and young parents services.

Councillor Snowdon commented that the presentation contained a number of acronyms and that it would be helpful to the Committee if in future if these were to be expressed fully.

Councillor Oliver stated that figures of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Sunderland was twice the national average and because of that he would like to endorse that those groups be targeted.

The Chairman thanked Ms Sherratt for her update.

The Committee then,

5. RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

Consultations and Publications

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with a summary of current Government consultations and publications as follows:-

- Legislation for Sure Start Children's Centres;
- Local Authority Performance Targets for Under Achieving Pupil Groups; and
- Revised Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities in England to identify children not receiving a suitable education.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

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

Ofsted Inspections

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

- Bernard Gilpin Primary School;
- Hetton Primary School; and
- Hylton Red House Primary School.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Oliver in referring to Hylton Red House Primary School Inspection Report expressed concern regarding “a lack of understanding by teachers of how to ensure that teaching leads sufficiently to learning”. Margaret Ferrie, Chief Inspector of Schools acknowledged these concerns and stated that they had been recognised. In order to address levels of under achievement an action plan had been put in place at the School. The action plan was incredibly detailed and every member of the School was involved.

Councillor Oliver then stated that although attendance and behaviour were both good, he had picked up that pupils were expected to listen for too long in classes and given limited guidance on how to improve their skills. Ms. Ferrie assured the Committee that teachers were responding effectively to challenge on this issue.

In response to an enquiry regarding why Governors had not developed any of the monitoring skills required to hold the school sufficiently to account for pupils' lack of progress, Ms. Ferrie advised that Governors were to be trained and supported in gathering evidence to allow them to probe, challenge and question the Head Teacher.

Mr. Snowden commented on the four instances of sickness absence, including the Head Teacher and the fact that it had got to that stage when the problems had been known about as early as 2006.

Councillor Bell commented that children in the foundation stages in this area had performed successfully and that it was a shame that poor leadership and management in the Primary School was resulting in them under-achieving. He expected in future for the Governors to be more involved.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman regarding what grade the school received following the last Ofsted, Ms. Ferrie responded that it had declined.

The Chairman then enquired whether the approach taken towards the school had not been sufficiently challenging. Ms. Ferrie responded that this was not the case, but that it had to be recognised that schools are largely autonomous. Over the past eighteen months things had improved in shared intelligence and the Council being able to intervene sooner. Work was also underway with the Governors Support Team to arrange for Governors to be trained in accordance with their revised responsibilities.

The Chairman then enquired how the action plan was improving these issues. Ms. Ferrie advised that the action plan highlighted issues that required attention, and acted as a vehicle to ensure that governing bodies were aware that challenges were in place.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the Ofsted Inspection Reports be received and noted.

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.