

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 9TH JULY, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, G. Hall, Kelly, T. Martin, Oliver and D. Richardson together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. D. Butler, Mrs. M. Goulden, Mrs. C. Hutchinson and Mr. S. Laverick.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Kelly, I. Richardson, Snowden and Tye and on behalf of Mr. Frank, Prof. Holmes and Mr. Snowden.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 18th June, 2009

Keith Moore, Deputy Executive Director of Children's Services drew members' attention to page 5 of the minutes and the enquiry made by Councillor Francis as to the rate of non co-operation among young people required to undergo the restorative justice programme. He advised that for the period 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008 728 young people were assigned to do reparation. Of this figure, 588 had attended (81%) while 140 had failed to attend (19%)

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 18th June, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item no. 7 – Joint Commissioning Strategy – Scoping Report for Policy Review.

Mr. Laverick declared a Personal Interest in the item as an employee of the City of Sunderland College.

Item no. 10 – Ofsted Inspections.

Councillor Bell declared a Personal Interest in the Item as a Governor of Castle View School.

Report on Swine Flu and Measles – NHS South of Tyne and Wear

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a presentation from Nonnie Crawford, Director of Public Health on the major issues surrounding swine flu and measles within Sunderland.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes).

Councillor Hall asked how successful had the MMR campaign been? Ms. Crawford replied that take up was too slow. It was still nowhere near the hoped for 90%.

Councillor T. Martin stated that all the latest literature indicated that the MMR was perfectly safe and the previous scare had been based on discredited evidence.

Councillor Francis stated that the MMR scare had related to worries over autism, mainly concerning an American based product, and asked whether given the sensitivities separate injections could be offered. Ms. Crawford replied that the currently operated standard procedures represented best practice. The alternative would require the recipient to undergo 6 separate injections. It was currently proving difficult to get people to accept 2 injections. The larger the number of injections the larger the number of potential application errors.

The Chairman asked how many parents had declined the invitation to have their child vaccinated during the recent campaign. Ms. Crawford advised that the campaign was still ongoing and therefore she did not have that information to hand, however, she would happily provide the figures at a later date.

With regard to swine flu issue, Councillor T. Martin and Mrs. Goulden highlighted the importance of the 'good neighbour' or 'flu friend'.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Hall, Ms. Crawford advised that the majority of fatalities had been among younger people. Although all had been diagnosed with swine flu not all had died from it.

Councillor Oliver stated that a lot of the deaths were referred to as having been the result of 'underlying causes' and asked if it was possible to highlight what these causes were. Ms. Crawford replied that it was dangerous to speculate but many would be the result of lung disease, kidney or liver problems. The messages in relation to swine flu were subtle and difficult and the situation was not being helped by the way stories were often portrayed in the media. She stated that the Sunderland Echo had produced an excellent editorial some weeks previously, however, this had been negated by the recent sensationalist stories in the newspaper. Reporting needed to be balanced. The main message was that the overwhelming majority of those affected would get better whether or not they received anti virals.

Keith Moore, Deputy Executive Director of Children's Services, stated that he would like to assure the Committee that the Local Authority had undertaken detailed

planning with regard to business continuity and would support schools in their efforts to stay open.

The Chairman referred to the expected arrival of a swine flu vaccine in August and asked if it would be targeted at specific groups. Ms. Crawford replied that discussions were ongoing and that the decisions that needed to be taken would be done so based on the best possible evidence.

Councillor Bell stated that there would always be a threat over the horizon and that the Spanish flu outbreak of 1919 had taught that there was no room for complacency.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Crawford for her presentation it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report by Lord Laming and the Government's Response to those Recommendations

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of progress made in relation to Lord Laming's review, the Government's response to its recommendations and the actions taken by Sunderland Children's Trust Laming Task and Finish Group in taking forward the recommendations.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Hutchinson referred to the report and the comment that three social workers had been supported through their degree courses by the Authority. She asked if in return they would be required to remain with the Authority for a certain time period. Mr. Moore, Deputy Executive Director, replied that it was difficult legally to bind employees in that way. The three staff members had previously worked for the Authority and wanted to continue to do so after their studies. The chances were good that they would stay with the Council.

Councillor T. Martin commented that that staff moral was an extremely important factor.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor T. Martin, Mr. Moore advised that the Contact Point System had been piloted in the North West of England and was due to be introduced in Sunderland during the autumn of 2009.

Mr. Laverick stated that when you examined the Baby P case it was obvious that everyone had to work together and that multi disciplinary work needed to be joined up.

Mr. Moore advised that it was an extremely difficult area of work and no commitments or guarantees could be given. The Authority worked with rigour and dedication with partners to ensure lessons were learned and that an environment

was created where people were not afraid to make mistakes. It required a professional environment where people were comfortable with their responsibilities and where there was a 'talking culture'.

Mrs. Hutchinson stated that social workers should never have to take decisions in isolation and asked Mr. Moore if he was confident that the social work service received appropriate support from the other organisations involved.

Mr. Moore replied that systems were formalised through the Sunderland Safeguarding Board. The organisations needed to be able to debate issues without being critical or locked into conflict.

It needed to be a forum where the organisations could listen, understand and review. Children's Services had an excellent working relationship with the other organisations involved and new ways of working had been developed in the City as a result of the review.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Oliver regarding workloads, Mr. Moore advised that the Manager needed to understand the totality of cases when allocating work. Social Workers faced a tough job and Children's Services did not want to burn its staff out. It wanted to be in a position where Sunderland became a quality choice for its staff.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman in respect of recommendation 10 of Lord Laming' report, Mr. Moore advised that Heads were briefed on the guidance in respect of the new school inspection framework and what lay behind it. The School Improvement Officer and Education Safeguarding Team Manager were working together to provide support and challenge to schools in order that they could comply with the new regimes.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Mr. Moore and Mr. McCracken for their report and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report and associated action plan be received and noted.

Policy Review Recommendations Update: Services for Children in Care 2007

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on progress made in implementing the recommendations contained within the 2007 Policy Review on Services for Children in Care.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mick McCracken, Head of Safeguarding, presented the report and drew Members' attention to paragraph 3.3 which highlighted the three key questions considered in the review and Appendix 1 which outlined progress to date in meeting the 12 recommendations arising from the review.

Councillor T. Martin welcomed the measures implemented in respect of recommendation 11 to minimise, wherever possible, the disruption at all transition points, particularly those of significant change.

The Chairman referred to recommendation No. 1 regarding Area Committee nominations to the Corporate Parenting Board. He stated that it was an extremely important role and asked for attendance details in respect of the Area Committee representatives.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman regarding recommendation No. 8, Mr. McCracken advised that all children looked after were required to have a review at six monthly intervals and that these were scrutinised by an Independent Review Officer and included the child's personal education plan.

With regard to recommendation 12 the Chairman asked whether bed and breakfast accommodation was still being utilised or whether it had been "consigned to history". He reiterated the view of the Committee that the use of bed and breakfast accommodation was totally unacceptable. Mr. Moore advised that he would provide the Committee with the exact figures.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Change in the Order of Business

At the instance of the Chairman it was agreed that item 10 on the agenda (Ofsted Inspections) should be considered at this juncture.

Ofsted Inspections

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

- Millfield Community Nursery;
- Castle View School.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair clarified that in relation to the new Castle View Enterprise Academy, and other Academies in Sunderland, the relationship with the Scrutiny Committee was different to that of other schools with no direct accountability through the Committee. It was nevertheless hoped to establish a good relationship with the new Academies once they were up and running and this process had already begun some time ago when the Committee met with the three sponsors.

Mike Foster having addressed issues raised by Councillor Oliver in respect of the existing Castle View School with regard to the quality of teaching, the Chairman referred to page 5 of the Ofsted letter in respect of 'External Support'. The letter stated that "the School has been very effectively supported by the local authority and

by the National Challenge Advisor". "The good quantity and quality of the support available has helped staff at all levels make progress and focus on bringing about improvement." The Chairman stated that it was unusual for a local authority to be credited in this way and it demonstrated that it had 'gone the extra mile' to support the school.

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

Joint Commissioning Strategy – Scoping Report for Policy Review

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which made proposals for Members with regard to their forthcoming review of commissioning arrangements within the Children and Young People's Plan.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karen Brown, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report and drew Members' attention to the table detailed in paragraph 61 which highlighted New/Recent Commissioning in Column A and Mature Commissioning in Column B. Members were recommended to choose one of the following service areas from Column A and one from Column B.

A New/Recent Commissioning

- i) 16-19 and Post 19 Education and Skills;
- ii) Employability of Young People;
- iii) Preventative Services;
- iv) Family and Parenting Support Services.

B Mature Commissioning

- i) Youth Services;
- ii) Childcare;
- iii) Family, Adult and Community Learning.

The Chairman moved that the Committee should opt for item i) (16-19 and Post 19 Education and Skills) from Column A together with item i) (Youth Services) from Column B and it was agreed accordingly.

Discussion ensued and Mrs. Brown suggested that the employability of young people should also be linked to the chosen options as part of the review. Councillor Hall agreed and suggested that representatives of industry be invited to attend the Committee so they could share exactly what it was they were looking for when employing young people.

6. RESOLVED that:-

- i) 16-19 and Post 19 Education and Skills be chosen for detailed investigation together with Youth Services Commissioning; and
- ii) the conduct of the review be undertaken as detailed in the report.

Request to Attend Conference

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) on a proposal to nominate delegates from the Committee to attend the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Annual Conference 'Impact, Inclusion, Information: The Value of Libraries – the Lives of Communities', to be held in Bristol between 7th and 9th October, 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman having moved that the Vice Chairman and one other Member be nominated to attend the Conference, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that approval be given to the attendance of the Vice Chairman, Councillor G. Hall together with Councillor T. Martin at the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Annual Conference to be held in Bristol between 7th and 9th October, 2009, such attendance to be funded from the Scrutiny Committee budget.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st July to 31st October, 2009

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) in respect of the above matter.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that the Forward Plan was being submitted to each of the Council's Scrutiny Committees as a pilot exercise to determine the value of it being submitted on a regular basis. The views of each of the Committees would be reported to the Management Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

Consideration was given to the report and whilst recognising that the Forward Plan was a useful tool, Members felt that the majority of its contents were of little relevance to the Committee. Accordingly Members requested that if it was to be submitted to future meetings as an information item it should be done so in a format that contained only items that were relevant to the remit of the Committee.

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that Members' comments be reported to the Management Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

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.