

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 17th SEPTEMBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, G. Hall, Kelly, Oliver, D. Richardson, I. Richardson and Snowdon together with Mr. H. Brown, Mrs. M. Harrop, Professor G. Holmes, and Mr. S. Laverick.

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Tye and on behalf of Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. D. Butler, Mr. M. Frank, Mrs. M. Goulden, Mrs. C. Hutchinson and Mr. D. Snowdon

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 9th July, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 9th July, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Sunderland Public Libraries

The Interim Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a review of key achievements and performance for 2008/2009, highlighting priorities for 2009/2010 for the Library Service.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism and Ms. Allison Clarke, Principal Librarian, presented the report, taking Members through the key achievements for 2008/09 which had included a full programme of activities and events which were in support of the city's strategic priorities. They also highlighted the priorities for 2009/2010 and drew Member's attention to the Reading Strategy that was currently being developed and due to be completed in the autumn, 2009.

Councillor Hall referred to the introduction of the new pricing policy and commented that a lot of groups who use facilities at libraries had raised concerns over the increases, some of which were 100%, for things such as photocopying, room hire and refreshments. Ms. Hall advised that she was aware that there had been some confusion over the introduction of the new pricing policies. She explained that the rationale behind the increases had been down to the fact that there had been no increase in the two previous financial years and there was a need to balance those needs of the customer and community with the running of the library as a business.

Some community and voluntary groups had received letters regarding the new prices which they should not have and library staff had met with these groups individually to explain the situation. The new pricing policy would be implemented and reviewed after six months when it would be looked at to see if there had been an increased income from it. Ms. Hall suggested that a report be brought back to the Committee once the findings had been received.

The Chairman asked that following the review process the Committee receive a draft of the document so that Members may have their input towards any decision on potential changes in prices and the rationale behind it.

Mr. Brown asked if there was an age limit for the Houghton Library Visually Impaired Person's Reading Group and when it was expected to be rolled out further. Ms. Clarke advised that there was no age limit and that there was also a young person's reading group which was free for the public to attend as well. The current group in the library had members of most ages who attended. With regards to the rolling out of the groups to other libraries, Members were informed that Washington was due to start in the next couple of months and then in other libraries they would be asking for expressions of interest.

In response to an enquiry from Mr. Laverick regarding the number of young boys attending libraries, Ms. Clarke explained that there were a number of initiatives aimed at increasing their participation, such as Dads and Lads Groups, Saturday Groups for Single Parents, etc. The success of these initiatives could be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee.

With regards to a question from the Chairman on Embervision, Ms. Clarke advised that the Society of Chief Librarians North East group had initiated the use of the software to ensure the delivery of consistent quality customer services across the region. They were looking at how best to market and promote the library service and ensure that the right stock was available for the local communities. An audit of all but two of the Sunderland libraries had been undertaken, the City Centre and Washington.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Hall and Ms. Clarke for her report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that the Committee receive further reports on the review of the pricing policy and the success of the initiatives to improve attendance to libraries by young boys in the future.

Progress Report on Hylton Red House Primary School

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on activity and progress at Hylton Red House Primary School that is subject to Special measures through an Ofsted judgement, following the third monitoring visit.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Professor Holmes welcomed the report and asked when the next milepost for the HMI monitoring visits would be and what, if any, interventions would the Interim Executive Board (IEB) need to be aware of in the meantime. Ms. Margaret Ferrie, Chief Inspector of Schools, advised that the next milepost would be the end of the new school year and that the appointment of the new Head Teacher would be the major influence. She advised that interviews for the post would be held on the 28th and 29th September, 2009 and that following their appointment they would work with the IEB and/or Mike Wooler, Acting Head Teacher to build on the strengths being established in the school and develop long term plans.

Councillor Bell asked who would be on the interview panel for the Head Teacher and was informed it would be made up of IEB members, Ms. Ferrie and Ms. Sue Morgan, Senior School Improvement Officer.

Councillor Oliver welcomed the progress made so far and asked for an update with regard to staff sickness levels as they had been high. Ms. Ferrie informed Members that the level of staff sickness was now reducing with some members of staff having retired and left the school. The IEB had only been formed very recently but would be working hard to ensure staff felt more secure in their positions.

In response to a comment from the Chairman regarding the twelve lessons or part lessons that were observed, Ms. Ferrie advised that teaching was now rated at a satisfactory level, having been recorded as a fail at the last monitoring visit. The Inspector had indicated that there had been a much stronger element of fun in learning and better engagement of pupils and staff.

The Chairman highlighted the local authority's positive contributions in providing external support to the school which had helped to bring about rapid and secure improvements.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Ms. Ferrie for her report and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report and positive comments from the monitoring visit be received and noted and that the Committee receive a further report following the next HMI inspection at the end of this year.

Provisional Sunderland National Curriculum Results for 2009

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an early update on the performance of pupils in statutory Key Stage assessments and Foundation Stage Profile in 2009.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Margaret Ferrie and Mr. Andrew Baker, Information Manager, presented the report advising that final results would be available later in the autumn term and therefore all key stage results within the report were provisional and subject to change.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding the assessment of pre-school centres, Ms. Ferrie advised that Sunderland did assess the benefit of children attending pre-nursery provision such as the Children's Centres. This was not a statutory request but Sunderland carried it out to help in capturing how children improve through their nursery and reception education years.

With regard to the improvement in communications, languages and literacy, Mr. Laverick asked when the benchmark figure for 2009 would be available and was advised that they were expected in October/November. Ms. Ferrie advised that she had had a glimpse of them and there was a basic rate of improvement in those areas nationally but not the 10 percentage points that Sunderland had expected.

Councillor Hall welcomed the improved results and asked if the new Ofsted framework and the removal of the value added exam results would have a knock on effect on the results in future years. Ms. Ferrie informed the Committee that Ofsted would look at how the overall scores are reached and the scores of the average pupils who are less able. She advised that there were now two levels of scoring and the lower 20% of results could influence the differential weighting of results for Maths and English. There had been discussions around increasing this which could be cause for concern.

The Chairman referred to the Key Stage 2 English results declining from 81% to 77% and queried what the results had been over the previous two years. Mr. Baker advised that the results had been around 83% and that national trends were seeing the results decline to around 80% also.

In response to queries from Members regarding the reason for differing results between boys and girls, Ms. Ferrie commented that the change in coursework provision may be an element but not a significant one. She advised that she felt that there was only an issue in some schools and it was not city wide, with other factors having an effect such as girls underperforming and some boys improving. It would

be possible for Members to receive a report with individual level data in the near future.

Councillor Hall commented that there was a demise of male role models in schools, with fewer male teachers taking up positions, and wondered if this could have an impact on the attainment of young boys in schools.

The Chairman commended the provisional results and felt that it was a great achievement for the city to have surpassed the national averages in some areas. Significant progress had also been made in the A Level results and all those involved should be congratulated.

The Chairman also advised the Committee that they would be receiving reports on Gender Attainment and the New Ofsted Framework at their next meeting.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Performance Report and Value for Money Self-Assessment 2008/2009

The Chief Executive, Interim Director Community and Cultural Services and Executive Director Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with a value for money assessment in relation to Children, Young People and Learning for the period of April 2008 to March 2009.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

With regard to a query from Councillor Hall relating to the service areas in the upper quartile, Mr. David May, Finance Manager, advised that Sunderland were at an advanced stage with Children's Centres and Building Schools for the Future, whereas other neighbouring authorities did not have the full infrastructure in place. He explained that there was sufficient information to validate the benchmark position.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 2.4 of the report and the reduction in youth disorder of 34.3%. He felt it would be beneficial to compare this with the reduction in youth disorder across the city in future reports for the Committee's consideration.

Councillor Francis asked who had designed the questionnaire for the Ipsos Mori residents survey and was advised that it had not been created by Children's Services but a response would be circulated to Committee Members.

Mr. Laverick asked how the targets had been modified and reviewed in relation to NEET, what with the current change in the economy and was advised by Mr. Keith Moore, Deputy Director Children's Services that they paid careful attention to the data they received surrounding NEET. The service had appointed a strong Data Manager so that a targeted approach could be taken to all young people with preventative work being carried out with them in school. He informed the Committee that it was also about getting an attractive core offer out to young people at the right time and ensuring they had the right information and guidance to make informed decisions on their future.

The Chairman referred to the table at 4.1 of the report and queried how the target was the same for 2009/2010 as it had been for 2008/2009 yet the performance had exceeded it for that year. Mr. Baker agreed to check the figures and report back to Members.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

New Arrangements for Safeguarding Inspections

The Executive Director Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the new arrangements for safeguarding inspections from April 2009 and the Sunderland arrangements in relation to this.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Moore presented the report and introduced Ms. Shirley Gounder, Interim Assistant Head of Safeguarding to the Committee, advising that the new Head of Safeguarding would be joining the Council on the 2nd November, 2009.

Mr. Moore advised Members that as from April 2009 the Joint Area Review inspections of children's services ceased and outcomes would now be fed through the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. The following two new inspections would take place relating to safeguarding children and young people:-

- Unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment of children in need and children who may be in need of protection; and
- Announced inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services.

In response to a comment from Professor Holmes, Mr. Moore advised that if the performance measures were good this would show an improved outcome for children and ensure that the service were improving and working correctly to safeguard them. He agreed that it would be a balancing act for managers to ensure that the quality measures were in place to help staff make sure that the outcomes and actions for each individual case were the most appropriate. He explained that it was critical that staff and managers looked at each case on an individual and stand alone basis to best manage and balance any evident risks.

Mr. Laverick commented that it would be a challenge to staff in social work and that it would be interesting to find out how much of their work time was spent doing paperwork and audits rather than actual social work. Mr. Moore advised that a lot of staff time was spent filling in the ICS and it would take doing an old fashioned time and motion test to discover how long each worker spent at their computer. Then it could be looked at as to how best provide support staff to enable the social worker to get out of the office.

Councillor Oliver commented that this point had been raised with the Executive Director Children's Services and asked if any progress had been made to date. Mr. Moore informed the Committee that they intended to create a number of 'super users' of the new system who could work with social workers to find how they could become smarter at using the system. They were also looking to encourage their current staff, who could all be from differing technology backgrounds, to find how they could best be supported to efficiently use their time.

The Chairman was aware that the caseload of each social worker had been significantly reduced but asked if a report could be prepared updating Members on the current situation.

Mr. Moore advised the Committee that newly qualified staff who had less than 12 months experience had a maximum of 15 cases. For experienced staff they were working towards reducing caseloads to 20 each but this wasn't always possible at the moment. He also informed Members that the service had retained 9 out of 10 of their staff in the last year.

Councillor Richardson commented that social workers were not IT specialists and suggested that there was a provision of departmental support for them. Mr. Moore responded that they were happy to look at any suggestions which may improve the service and that they were also looking at national examples of good practice for ideas. He also commented that some members of staff were quite happy with ICT part of their job and felt it was quicker for them to complete than to hand it over to another member of staff.

Councillor Snowden asked if a caseload referred to an individual child or family, as some families may need more support and be a heavier workload than others. Ms. Gounder informed the Committee that it was families and that the level of need and support was taken into account when delegating to staff members. Newly qualified members of staff had a good support system in place to help them settle into their role.

Members were keen to see that a fair balance was struck up between safeguarding and the best interests of the individual family. They realised the work of a social worker was getting harder and harder with more strains being put on the individual. They praised the work of the social workers and support staff and commended the quality of the reports and improvements made to date.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Moore and Ms. Gounder for their report, and it was:-

6. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted;
- ii) Members agree to be involved in focus groups with inspectors, should that be a requirement;

- iii) Members agree to receive feedback information regarding the inspections when they occur, and monitor implementation of any actions that may arise; and
- iv) to receive a future report about the workload of social workers and how it is broken down.

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).

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

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 September – 31 December 2009

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 September – 31 December 2009.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

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.