

CHILDREN'S AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 9TH APRIL, 2014

Present – Councillors Ashcroft (Chairman), Cox (Vice-Chairman), C. Burrows, L. Byrne, Cunliffe, Mrs Fairclough, Lewis, Mistry, Spencer, Swarbrick and Watters.

Representing Primary School Parent Governors

Ms S. Dunne – Co-opted Member

Representing Healthwatch

Mr J. Firth

Also in Attendance

Councillor McKeon	-	Cabinet Member for Schools and Skills
Councillor Murray	-	Cabinet Member for Looked After Children, Safeguarding and Early Years
Councillor A. Connell	-	Cabinet Member for Sport, Libraries, Youth and Culture
Ms M. Asquith	-	Director of Children's and Adult Services
Mr J. Livesey	-	Assistant Director of Children's and Adult Services
Ms J. Spencer	-	Head of Library and Museum Services
Mrs S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A. Ismail, Kay, Rushton and Mrs Thomas and from Ms S. Raja (Co-Opted Member)

Councillor Ashcroft in the Chair.

34. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's and Culture Scrutiny Committee held on 12th February, 2014 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be received and signed as a correct record.

35. MONITORING OF DECISIONS

The Director of Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which detailed the progress of decisions taken at previous meetings of this Committee

Resolved - That the position be noted.

36. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report which set out details of the updated work programme for the Committee for the current Municipal Year.

Resolved – That the updated work programme be approved.

37. IMPACT OF INCREASE IN FREE SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES ON EDUCATION

Mr J. Livesey gave a presentation which outlined the main impacts of the increase in Free Schools and Academies in Bolton.

Members were informed that there were currently four secondary academies, eight primary academies and one free school in the Borough with 18.8% of secondary pupils being educated in academies and 11% of primary pupils being educated in academies or free schools in Bolton.

Details of the future development of other academies/free schools planned for 2015 were also provided.

The presentation went on to focus on the impact of the increase in academies and free schools in terms of governance, partnerships, policy, school improvement, finance (schools and Local Authority blocks), school admissions, school organisation and traded services.

Key points included:

- reduced Council involvement in the direct running of schools;
- creation of a range of Trust arrangements;
- academies and free schools not bound by the Council's policies and procedures;
- councils had limited control over the performance and improvement of academies and free schools although the councils could still be held to account for the performance of academies and free schools in their area;
- academies and free schools set their own admission policies and admission numbers and can expand at will although they are still required to comply with the law relation to admissions and participate in the Local Authority's coordinated admissions scheme;
- councils retained the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places;
- all schools, whatever their status, had delegated budgets and were free to purchase their support services from any suitable provider;
- maintained schools pooled resources and retained funding centrally for various services whilst academies offered these services on a buy-back basis via a Service Level Agreement;
- Education Service Grant (ESG) for local authority duties transferred to academies and allocated to local authorities and academies on a per pupil basis;
- ESG Retained Duties Funding Rate – paid to authorities for statutory duties that did not transfer to academies was £15 per pupil; and
- consultation was expected in order to clarify the responsibilities covered by the ESG.

Analysis of data showed that overall, there was no significant difference in the popularity of schools becoming academies.

Following the presentation, members discussed a number of issues and made various comments/observations, as follows:

- there was no requirement for Local Authority representatives to be appointed to academy governing bodies although some had chosen to include them;
- during the transitional stage, all assets on site transferred from the Local Authority to the academy;
- the Council would grant permission for the academy to use the school's playing fields although they did not transfer to the academy;
- academies and free schools could set their own curriculum with outcomes being used to measure performance;
- concerns that the Local Authority no longer had the powers to intervene in non-performing schools although the Council could still be held accountable – it was acknowledged however that the LEA maintained good relationships with academies and free schools and hoped that issues could be resolved prior to any problems being encountered ; and
- expectations from Ofsted that good relations would be maintained between the LEA and academies and free schools and for the LEA to anticipate any problems regarding poor performance and to assist in addressing them.

Resolved – That Mr Livesey be thanked for his informative presentation.

38. ADOPTION UPDATE

Ms M. Asquith gave a presentation which updated members on the success to date of the recently launched adoption recruitment campaign Adopt North West.

The Campaign had been funded collaboratively between 22 North West authorities and had launched on 10th March, 2014. It would run for 10 months with three two week periods of intensive television and radio activity and ongoing digital and PR promotion.

The Campaign aimed to increase interest in adoption with the key objective being to assess, or begin the assessment of, an additional 150 adopters in the 10 month period. This would give a return on investment of £2,500 per adopter.

Bolton was the host authority for the Adopt North West with a number of key personnel being based at Paderborn House.

The presentation focused on data collected over the first two weeks of the Campaign and initial results indicated that the initiative would be successful. Members were advised of the number and sources of enquiries received for all authorities involved together with an early indication of how many of these may be converted.

With regard to general adoption figures, members were advised that adoption timescales and threshold figures were improving and it was hoped that Bolton would be one of the top in the country in terms of Special Guardianship Orders.

Resolved – That Ms Asquith be thanked for her informative presentation and that a further update on the Adopt North West Campaign be submitted to this Committee in due course.

39. MEETING THE UNIVERSAL OFFERS FRAMEWORK FOR LIBRARIES

Ms J. Spencer gave a presentation which outlined the background to the introduction of the Universal Offers Framework into libraries since January, 2013 and described how Bolton was meeting the new requirements.

The presentation advised that the Universal Offers framework had been developed by the Society of Chief Librarians in partnership with the Arts Council England and had been

introduced into libraries in 2013. The Framework built on the Envisioning Libraries of the Future publication and covered the four key areas which library customers and stakeholders deemed to be integral to a 21st Century library service, namely:

- digital;
- information;
- reading; and
- health and wellbeing.

The presentation went on to focus on how Bolton Library had introduced various initiatives and practices to meet the new requirements and enhance the library experience for service users. Various examples were provided including:

- Skillbuild at Brightmet Library;
- 24/7 access to services through a virtual library presence;
- computer mentors;
- information professionals in libraries;
- books on prescription;
- active ageing activities; and
- dementia awareness sessions.

Resolved – That Ms Spencer be thanked for her informative presentation.

40. MEMBERS BUSINESS

The Committee received the extracts of minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:-

- (a) The Executive Cabinet Deputy Leader's Portfolio held on 10th February, 2014; and
- (b) The Cabinet held on 17th February, 2014.

Resolved – That the minutes of the various meetings be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and ended at 6.25 pm)

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