

CHILDREN'S SERVICES, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND SPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING 16 AUGUST 2007

Present – Councillors Ashcroft (Chair), A. Wilkinson (Vice-Chair), Barrow, Connell, Hornby, Murray, Rock, Mrs. Rothwell, Rushton, Scowcroft, Mrs. Swarbrick, R. Wilkinson, and Williamson.

Lay Members

Ms. F. Hill - Unison

Also in attendance:

Councillor Mrs. Thomas	-	Executive Member for Children's Services
Councillor J. Byrne	-	Executive Member for Young People and Sport
Mrs. M. Asquith	-	Director of Children's Services
Mr. S. Fazal	-	Assistant Director (Access and Inclusion), Children's Services
Mrs. L. Jones	-	Assistant Director (Children and Families), Children's Services
Mrs. J. Thompson	-	Assistant Director (Positive Contribution), Children's Services
Mrs. C. Davies	-	Head of Finance, Children's Services
Mr. A. Donaldson	-	Head of Policy and Improvement
Mr. I. D. Mulholland	-	Scrutiny Team Leader
Mr. J. Dearling	-	Senior Scrutiny Officer
Ms. L. Gray	-	Children's Services Manager, Action with Young Carers, Barnardo's

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Dennis.

Councillor Ashcroft in the Chair.

7. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2007 were submitted.

Resolved - That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

8. MONITORING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SCRUTINY PANEL DECISIONS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report that informed members of the progress of decisions taken and issues raised by the Committee.

Further to minute 52, Children's Services Portfolio Revenue and Capital, Month 9, Monitoring Report, 29 March 2007, the Committee was presented with further details of the Council's actions to reduce instances of unauthorised absences. The Committee was informed of the Council's range of strategies to improve attendance: better use of data, truancy sweeps, first day response, penalty notices, prosecutions, targeted support for persistent absentee students, and support targeted more at priority schools. The Committee was advised that the use of targeted support and intervention with priority schools would be taken to other schools by the Education Social Work Service. Members were informed that greater use of multi-disciplinary teams had been identified as a potential way forward.

In reply to questions from members, the Committee was informed that codes used to record unauthorised absences accorded with Department for Education and Skills guidance and ensured data was comparable between local authorities.

In response to questions from members, the Committee was advised that truancy sweeps could be requested by schools, or the police, or the Council's education social work team. Members also referred to the problem of parentally condoned absence.

In response to questions from members, the Committee was informed that extended holidays abroad could, with the agreement of the school, result in the child being removed from the school's register.

Members questioned when and how often afternoon attendance was recorded by schools and were informed that afternoon registration times were set by each school.

In response to questions, the Committee was informed that recording unauthorised absences in a new electronic format enabled patterns in unauthorised absences to be seen more easily.

With reference to minute 44, Minutes of Children's Scrutiny Committee, 1 February 2007, 29 March 2007, a member requested information on the take up of free swimming. The Committee was informed that demand had been significantly higher than expected.

- Resolved - (i) That an update report on unauthorised absences be provided to the 31 January 2008 meeting of the Committee.
- (ii) That further details of the take up of free swimming be provided to the Committee.

9. EXECUTIVE, EXECUTIVE MEMBER, AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP MEETINGS

An extract of the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 2 July 2007 were submitted.

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive Member for Children's Services held on 10 July 2007 and 7 August 2007 were submitted.

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive Member for Young People and Sport held on 10 July 2007 and 7 August 2007 were submitted.

With reference to the minutes of the Executive Member for Young People and Sport, members discussed issues in relation to the current levels of work activity. In relation to associated

Policy Development Groups, members discussed the frequency of meetings.

Resolved – That the decisions of the Executive and the Executive Members be noted.

10. IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES FOR SCRUTINY / ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which provided members with suitable criteria to aid in the selection of topics for scrutiny and outlined the Committee's work programme.

Members' views and comments were sought in relation to any further items and issues that they wanted including on the Committee's work programme, but members indicated their satisfaction with the current timetabled work schedule.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

11. CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUT-TURN REPORT, 2006/07

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report showing the out-turn revenue and capital position for the Children's Services portfolio for 2006/07. The report indicated a positive balance of £7.5 million, including school balances and reserves. The Committee was advised that reduced levels of spending on capital schemes were due to reasons such as projects spanning more than one financial year or funding being taken on by other Council services.

The report detailed surplus and deficit balances for each individual school, including 13 primary schools and 5 secondary schools in a deficit financial position.

In reply to a question concerning apparent patterns of continuing deficits over a period of years at some schools, the Committee was advised of the particular circumstances of each school and the actions taken.

Members questioned the use of eligibility for free school meals as a criterion for Special Educational Needs funding. In response the Committee was informed that free school meal eligibility was part of the formula used to determine funding and that the criteria were kept under review.

In reply to a question from members about identified cashable Gershon efficiencies for 2006/07, the Committee was informed that while not all the individual savings had been accomplished the overall target of £1.2 million had been achieved.

In relation to departmental performance for 2006/07, members asked for an explanation as to the number of Every Child Matters – Enjoy and Achieve performance indicators missing their target. The Committee was advised that data used to calculate the BVPIs was unavoidably out of date.

Members asked for the likely Annual Performance Assessment ratings for 2007, and were advised that the scoring system had changed. The Committee was informed that the ratings would probably be higher than in 2006 for both Children's Social Care Services and for Capacity to Improve and remain unchanged for Children's Services.

In response to questions, the Committee was informed that a national average for the number of racial incidents recorded in schools would, if obtainable, be supplied to a future meeting. The Committee was advised that the rise in such incidents in Bolton was due to a tightening up in recordings, but that the situation was being monitored closely.

The Committee also sought assurances that the Council, in the light of announcements from central government, was making plans to make provision for children until 18 years of age. In reply the Committee was informed that children received personalised learning as part of the 14-19 agenda and that plans at Withins School were progressing.

In reply to questions on Bolton's under-18 conception rates, the Committee was advised that the teenage pregnancy strategy had begun later in Bolton than in other local authorities and would take some time to impact.

Members queried why three customer complaints took longer than 21 days for Children's Services to respond to. The

Director of Children's Services explained that misrecordings, together with the misdirection of a complaint, were the cause of the reported delays and assured members that internal procedures had been improved as a consequence.

In response to questions from members about the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents in Bolton, members were advised that Bolton was on target to reduce its figure. Members suggested that the practices of Hull City Council be explored, including the use of signage designed by children and 20mph zones for housing estates.

Members suggested that attendance and exclusion data should in future include the previous year's figures, that the educational attainment of looked after children should include the percentage leaving care with at least one GCSE A*-C, and that Not in Education, Employment, or Training data should indicate Council targets. Members indicated that the report's performance dashboard was very useful and informative.

- Resolved - (i) That a presentation on road safety education and training undertaken in Bolton's schools be held at a future meeting of the Committee.
- (ii) That the improvements suggested by the Committee, detailed above, be incorporated into future departmental financial performance reports.

12. EXTENDED SCHOOLS – VERBAL UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Positive Contribution), Children's Services, provided a verbal update on the Extended Schools programme in Bolton. She stated that a written report on the programme would be provided to the 11 October 2007 meeting of the Committee.

The Committee was informed that the Council had adopted a multi-agency partnership approach to deliver the core offer of services. The Assistant Director stated that revenue funding for 2006/07 was £750,000 and looked set to be at a similar level for 2007/08. The Committee was advised that by 2010 all schools had to meet the core offer of services.

With reference to a past project for children that had been administered by the Council, members asked about the disclosure of the administration costs of the extended schools programme. In reply the Committee was advised that costs of rolling out and supporting the programme would be given in budget figures.

In response to questions, the Committee was informed that sport figured prominently in a range of proposals for extended schools.

Resolved – That the Committee be provided with a written report on extended services at its next meeting.

13. BARNARDOS ACTION WITH YOUNG CARERS

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report informing the Committee about the service in Bolton for Young Carers and their families. The report suggested that there were approximately 1000-1200 young carers living in Bolton at any one time and described the support offered through Barnardo's Action With Young Carers project. The Committee was advised that Barnardo's approach was threefold: to improve the life chances of young carers; to support parents to be good parents; and to ensure schools, councils, and other organisations knew how to support young carers.

The Children's Services Manager, Action with Young Carers, Barnardo's, informed the Committee that she hoped the Council would continue to see young carers as a key issue after the proposed end of the Carers Grant in 2008.

In response to questions from members, the Children's Services Manager, Action with Young Carers, Barnardo's, suggested that there should be differentiation between carers and young carers in the Council's strategic planning.

Resolved – That the Children's Services Manager, Action with Young Carers, Barnardo's, provide the Committee with detailed recommendations for consideration around the issue of young carers in Bolton.

14. PROGRESS REPORT OF THE BOLTON COUNCIL CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the recommendations and actions within the final report of the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Panel. The Committee was informed that all the recommendations of the original Panel report had been adopted.

Members discussed the issue of the low take up by members of the opportunity to visit children's homes and the consequent recent suspension of such arrangements. The Committee was advised that visits to homes were not always the best approach and that the Council's mentoring scheme was open to councillors as well as staff.

The Executive Member for Children's Services suggested that a Policy Development Group be established to investigate how individual councillors could best be corporate parents.

Resolved – That the Committee continue to monitor the Council's progress in relation to Corporate Parenting.

(The meeting started at 4.04pm and finished at 5.42pm)