

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 26TH AUGUST, 2010

Present – Councillors Mrs Brierley (Chairman), Wild (Vice-Chairman), P. Allen, Ashcroft, Connell (as deputy for Councillor White), Mrs. Connell, Cottam, Darvesh, Francis, Harkin (as deputy for Councillor McKeon), Mistry, Norris (as deputy for Councillor Rushton), Mrs. Rothwell and D.A. Wilkinson (as deputy for Councillor Mrs Swarbrick).

Lay Member

Ms. J. Martin - Foster Carer

Also in Attendance

Mr. I. D. Mulholland - Principal Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Adia - Executive Member for Children's Services

Councillor Murray - Executive Member for Looked After Children and Safeguarding

Mr. J. Livesey Assistant Director, Performance, Planning and Resources

Mr. J. Daly - Assistant Director Staying Safe

Ms. C. Greer - Strategic Manager, Early Years

Ms. J. Thompson - Assistant Director Positive Contribution

Mr. D. Smith - Policy Accountant

Ms. C. Ellis - Development Manager, Innovation Zone Bolton

Mr. P. Round - Head of Sports Services

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors McKeon, Rushton, Mrs. Swarbrick and White.

Councillor Mrs. Brierley in the Chair.

7. ITEM OF URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that there was an urgent item concerning the future strategy for the Bolton Town Centre Skate Park, which was not specified on the agenda for this meeting.

The reasons for urgency were as follows:-

At a meeting of the Planning Committee held on 19th August, 2010, consideration of continued planning approval was discussed and deferred pending a study of the skate park strategy by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Planning Committee would once again consider the matter in a month's time and any recommendations would need to be presented to the Executive Member for Children's Services before then.

8. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th June, 2010 were submitted.

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

9. MONITORING OF DECISIONS

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

Resolved – That the position be noted.

10. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of the Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which set out details of the previously agreed Committee Work Programme for the 2010/11 Municipal Year.

Members' views were sought in relation to any further items that they wanted including in the work programme. The report also included information which would aid the Committee in selecting appropriate items for future consideration.

Resolved – That the updated work programme be noted.

11. STRATEGY FOR THE TOWN CENTRE SKATE PARK

Further to Minute 7 above, the Committee agreed to consider the following item of business as an urgent item:-

Ms. Christine Ellis, Development Co-ordinator: Bolton Innovation Zone, and Mr. P. Round, Head of Sports Services, gave a joint presentation on matters around the strategy for the Town Centre Skate Park.

With regard to background information, the Committee was advised that the Dawes Street Skate Park was installed in the summer of 2007, and:-

- current planning permission expired at the end of this month;
- It was managed by a multi-agency Management Group;
- there had been one reported incidence of anti-social behaviour over the past 12 months, compared to six during 2008/09;
- was part of Town Centre Neighbourhood Policing Teams daily patrols;
-

patrols were increased during school holidays, evenings, weekends and hot sunny days;

- It was monitored by the Council's Security and Response Team via CCTV;
- weekly equipment inspections made;
- part of Town Centre daily cleansing routine – manually litter picked and mechanically swept each day;
- litter bins were emptied on a daily basis;
- Bolton YMCA commissioned to provide a detached youth work team in partnership with Council Youth Services; and
- currently planning application was deferred pending a Scrutiny Committee review of alternative sites.

With regard to the options for alternative sites for the Skate Park, the Committee were apprised of the following salient issues:-

- open to townscape / capable of supervision;
- proximity to Victoria Square;
- capability of long term use;
- proximity to residential property;
- proximity to commercial premises; and
- scoring against each criterion.

The following other considerations were also taken into account:-

- accessibility by public transport;
- land ownership e.g. Council owned;

- design constraints of site; and
- short, medium and long term proposals for each.

Ms. Ellis went on to inform the Committee of the various pros and cons of the following site options:-

- Queens Park / Spa Road;
- King Street;
- Back Cheapside;
- Poole Street; and
- existing Dawes Street location.

The Committee were informed that, based on the criteria, the Queens Park/Spa Road location appeared to be the best potential alternative but the cost in the order of £300,000-£400,000 for a bespoke new, quality site would be significant.

In conclusion, Members were advised that:-

- apart from Queens Park, all possible alternative sites were development opportunities;
- significant costs of relocating equipment and/or new facility;
- management arrangements were working well on the current site;
- the facility was well used and was popular;
- skateboarding within the retail core was being minimised; and
- with some minor repairs and continued proper policing and supervision it could continue on Dawes Street for the foreseeable future.

Members in their deliberations referred to:-

- the granting of temporary planning permissions for the site;
- matters around the Queens Park site behind the Bolton Lads and Girls Club;
- outreach to young people using Bolton Town Hall Square;
- matters around what equipment the young people wanted;
- lack of toilet facilities on current site;
- current location seemed popular;
- consulting the young people, YMCA, Bolton Lads and Girls Club and other groups on the way forward;
- the long term development needed to be looked at;
- additional sites rather than an alternative; and
- a long term activity or a phase.

Resolved – That the Executive Member for Children's Services be recommended to:-

- (a) undertake consultation with young people on their needs and expectations in terms of a skate park facility;
- (b) explore the possible need for a more advanced level skate board facility; and
- (c) consider all matters around alternative sites and management thereof and also the need for additional facilities.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY, EFFICIENCIES AND GRANTS

Mr. John Livesey, Assistant Director Performance Planning and Resources gave a presentation updating the Committee on the current challenges and opportunities regarding value for money, efficiencies and grants.

The Committee was reminded of the planned savings and efficiencies, viz:-

- core LA budget / excluding schools - £37m;
- area based grant - £11m; and
- specific ring fenced grants - £24m:
 - Find Your Talent;
 - Inspiring Communities;
 - Playing for Success; and
 - Contactpoint.

Members were also advised of matters around the re-direction targets, which for 2011/12 to 2012/14 would be £12.782m.

The Committee was reminded of the Children's Services efficiencies approved by the Executive in June, 2010.

	£000
Looked After Children	506
Integrating Services	277
Family support / parenting	
Inclusion and engagement	
Reconfiguration of School Improvement Service	485
Reduction in Educational Psychologists	273
Review of Traded Services	416
Efficiency Savings	970
Accommodation	
Children with Disabilities	
Vacancy management	

Vulnerable People's Transport	
Reduced Uniform Grants / Disc. Awards / Summer Play	93
Integration of Youth, Health, Sport and Inclusion	345
Increased income	459

The Committee were further advised of the savings and efficiencies approved by the Executive Member for Children's Services on 27th July, 2010:-

- Looked After Children Strategy;
- Restructure of Educational Achievement;
- Restructure of Education Psychology Service;
- Restructure of Integrated Working Team;
- Discretionary School Uniform Grant; and
- Discretionary Education Award.

With regard to the Looked After Children Strategy, Members were advised that:-

- Bolton spent approximately £14m on looked after children;
- there had been a reduction in the number of Out of Borough placements;
- increased use of Bolton foster carers and reduced use of fostering agencies;
- there had been an increased adoption rate; and
- there was a long term strategy aimed at reducing the number of LAC.

In terms of the restructure of Educational Achievement, the Committee were advised:-

- reduction in core budget of £485;

- significant loss of grant funding for national strategies;
- a smaller more service:
 - removal of 15 consultant posts
 - reduction in adviser and professional officer posts
- a focus on strategic leadership, brokerage and commissioning and of support; and
- development of a quality assured marketplace to meet school support and development requirements.

With regard to the restructure of Educational Psychology, the Committee were informed:-

- Educational Psychology would provide statutory / essential services only:
 - assessment to support SEN statements;
 - EPs to carry a caseload of one assessment per week
 - support to Looked After Children;
 - critical incident support;
- schools would need to purchase EP support independently for non-statutory / non-essential services;
- there would be a net reduction of 5.5 fte posts (plus the disestablishment of one vacant post);
- proposed new structure would consist of one Senior Education Psychologist and three Educational Psychologists; and
- a resultant saving of £270,000.

In terms of the restructure of Integrated Working Team, the Committee was informed of:-

- cancellation of National Contactpoint System;

- system turned off on 6th August;
- funding ended August, 2010;
- five posts redundant;
- new post of Integrated Working Training and Support Officer;
- small integrated working function retained;
- local Child Index System remained but would be delivered in a different way to keep costs down; and
- grant funded service so no saving on LA budget.

With regard to the Discretionary School Uniform Grant, it was explained that the new policy would only apply to years 7 and 9 and £30 and £25 respectively.

Members in their deliberations referred to:-

- the possible effects of budget cuts on children and families. It was explained that services for children were becoming more integrated, although this was a challenging area the Department were trying to build in safeguarding. In terms of foster carers, the Committee was informed that they were still being recruited and adoption rates were good;
- the failure of some parents to responsibly care for their children;
- matters around the admittance of foster children to academies. It was indicated that under the admissions code, priority would be given to Looked After children and in terms of in year admissions;
- matters around staying in foster care beyond age 18;

issues around school governors having difficulty managing budgets and buying in services; and

- the cost of school uniforms, available grants, numbers of uniform suppliers and schools buying in uniforms.

Resolved – (i) That Mr. Livesey be thanked for the detailed presentation and that the position be noted.

(ii) That the Executive Member for Children's Services be asked to encourage, via Governors' Support, matters around the promotion of nonexpensive school uniform designs, increasing the number of suppliers and possible purchase of uniforms by schools for sell on.

13. FRONT LINE SOCIAL WORKERS

The Committee were apprised of background information on the key challenges facing social workers prior to a Member Visitation to provide a degree of understanding and reassurance to social worker individuals.

Mr. John Daley, Assistant Director Staying Safe, advised the Committee that there had been 397 referrals in 2009 and 550 in 2010, a 39% increase. The number of new child protection plans had also increased by 41% in the same period.

The Committee was informed that since the, Baby Peter Case, there had been an increase of 166 children subject to child protection plans in Bolton.

The numbers of Looked After Children had increased from 436 in March, 2009 to 481 in March, 2010, interim care orders in the same period had increased by 64.

In conclusion, Mr Daley advised the Committee of the volume of work undertaken by each of the three teams in Bolton, the social worker levels of post qualification experience and the outcome of a social worker survey with Bolton being compared to national statistics and Bolton's performance was good.

Members went on to discuss:-

- matters around the re-deployment of individuals to social worker posts and the appropriate management of this; and
- the low sickness rate of Bolton's social workers.

Resolved – (i) That Mr. Daley be thanked for his informative presentation and that the position be noted.

(ii) That proposed date options for Committee Member visits to the social worker teams be circulated and that the visits be arranged as soon as practicable.

14. SURE START/CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Ms. Catherine Greer, Strategic Manager Early Years, gave a presentation examining the processes and success measurement of Sure Start/Children's Centres particularly in relation to hard to reach families.

The Committee was advised of the following in terms of Children's Centre Development:-

- 18 Children's Centres operational;
- 11 in 30% most disadvantaged areas;
- 6 in each area – 3 per Head of Centre; and
- 15 Centres delivering the full core offer and 3 Centres designated due to achieve full core offer in January, 2011.

Members were informed that there was a staffing establishment of 166 posts, made up of:-

- 49 Outreach Workers (38 fte);

- 23 Early Years Workers (15 fte);
- 27 fte Centre based staff (Centre Assistants, Information Assistants, Cafe staff, Admin); and
- 6 Heads and 6 Deputies; and
- 41 vacancies currently.

In terms of the identification of those who needed an Early Intervention Service, the Committee was informed of key elements:-

- shared data;
- data analysis;
- local intelligence;
- assessment by universal services;
- use of the Framework for Action; and
- referrals on single agency form, Common Assessment Framework or initial assessment form.

Members were also advised of issues around deciding who received what Service:-

- referrals came into Children's Centre Multi Agency Resource Panels (MARPs);
- a multi-agency support package was agreed;
- time limited and outcome focused;
- including: home visits, parenting sessions or courses, plus referrals to other agencies; and
- a lead agency was appointed to co-ordinate the package.

In conclusion, Ms. Greer informed the Committee of information around how outcomes were monitored:-

- reports from Estart (Children's Centre Information Management System);
- work agreements and family plans;
- MARP reviews work undertaken against planned outcomes;
- case studies;
- using the Framework for Action to identify that level of need had been reduced;
- the LA monitor performance of children's centres; and
- Ofsted monitored performance of children's centres through inspection.

Members in their deliberations referred to:-

- current staff vacancies and employment of agency staff;
- matters around the offering of a full service with staff vacancies. It was explained that flexibility was key and a focus on the most disadvantaged areas; and
- forthcoming inspection of children's centres.

Resolved – That Ms. Greer be thanked for the presentation and that the position be noted.

15. BSF UPDATE

Mrs. Margaret Asquith, Director, explained to the Committee that as Members were well aware, the Building Schools for the

Future programme had been cancelled for Bolton. In terms of Kearsley Academy, it was explained that the budget had been agreed and the School would open in September. It was envisaged that the school would receive a capital allocation after the October spending review.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

16. MEMBERS' BUSINESS

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

- (a) Children's Policy Development Group held on 30th June and 19th July, 2010.
- (b) BSF and Primary Capital Policy Development Group held on 26th July, 2010.
- (c) Executive Member for Children's Services held on 7th June, 28th June and 27th July, 2010.
- (d) Executive Member for Looked After Children and Safeguarding held on 7th June, 2010, and 28th June and 26th July, 2010.
- (e) The Executive held on 28th June and 26th July, 2010.

Resolved – (i) That the minutes of the meeting be noted.

(The meeting started at 4.00 p.m. and finished at 6.26 p.m.)

F16

NOTES