

CHILDREN'S AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2014

Present – Councillors Ashcroft (Chairman), Wild (Vice-Chairman), Hall, Haworth, Iqbal, Jones, Mistry, Murray, Richardson, Shaw, Spencer, Sherrington and Swarbrick.

Co-opted Members

Ms M. Raja – Representative of Secondary Parent Governors

Also in Attendance

Councillor Mrs Thomas	-	Executive Cabinet Member Deputy Leader
Councillor McKeon	-	Executive Member for Education and Schools
Councillor J. Byrne	-	Executive Member for Culture and Youth
Mr J. Daly	-	Assistant Director of Children's and Adult Services
Mr T. Birch	-	Assistant Director of Children's and Adult Services
Ms M Keane	-	Collections Manager, Libraries and Museum Services
Mrs S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Watters and from Mr S. Dunne (Primary Parent Governors Representative)

Councillor Ashcroft in the Chair.

21. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's and Culture Scrutiny Committee held on 8th October, 2014 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be received and signed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Iqbal in the list of apologies for absence.

22. 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.

23. 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, which had been formulated following the workshop session at the first meeting.

Resolved – That the updated work programme be approved.

24. FREE NURSERY PROVISION FOR TWO YEAR OLDS

Mr T. Birch gave a presentation which updated members on the provision of free nursery places for 2 year olds.

Members were reminded that Phase 1 of the scheme had been implemented in September, 2013 with free nursery places equating to 570 hours per year, being offered to 855 children in Bolton who met the following criteria:

- children whose family's gross income was less than £16,190 per year; and
- children who were Looked After and on Child Protection Plans.

As from September, 2014, the criteria had been extended to enable increased provision to 40% of the least disadvantaged nationally (50% in Bolton) which equated to 1942 places.

With effect from January, 2015, the provision would be further increased to 54% of all two year olds in Bolton equating to 2116 places.

The criteria included:

- families in receipt of income, income based Job Seekers Allowance, support through the Immigration and Asylum Act, State Pension Credit and Child Tax/ Working Tax Credit;
- Children who were Looked After by the Local Authority;
- Had a current Statement of SEN or EHC Plan;
- Had left care through special guardianship or adoption or residence order;
- In receipt of Disability Living Allowance; and
- Local Discretionary criteria – children on child protection plans and other identified vulnerable groups.

Various graphs were submitted which demonstrated eligibility and take-up of places, current provision and areas of need.

The presentation provided details in relation to sufficiency and take-up of places, and outlined plans to increase these.

Details in relation to future funding of the initiative were also outlined.

Following the presentation, members commented that attendance at a school nursery did not always guarantee attendance at that same school once school age was reached which could be detrimental to the child's wellbeing.

Mr Birch advised that this was currently not part of the Local Education Authority's admission criteria and a review of the whole school admission process would be required in order to look at that issue.

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

25. FAMILY JUSTICE REVIEW

Mr J. Daly gave a presentation which outlined the role and function of the Family Justice Review Board which had been established in 2012 to oversee improvements to the Family Justice system following an independent review of the process.

A number of family justice measures had been included in the Children's and Families Act 2014, as follows:

- ensuring that expert evidence in family proceedings concerning children was permitted only when necessary to resolve the case justly, taking account of factors including the impact on the welfare of the child; and
- introducing a maximum 26-week time limit for completing care and supervision proceedings, with the possibility of extending the time limit in a particular case for up to 8 weeks at a time, should that be necessary to resolve the proceedings justly.

Other measures to protect vulnerable children included:

- changes to the law to give children in care the choice to stay with their foster families until they turned 2; and
- reforms to children's residential care to make sure homes were safe and secure and to improve the quality of care vulnerable children received.

With regard to adoption changes, the presentation advised that:

- the Act required local authorities to consider placing children with family or friend carers in the first instance and, if that was not appropriate, to then try to place children in foster-to-adopt arrangements with their prospective adopters;

- the Act repealed the requirement for councils to give ‘due consideration’ to children’s racial, religious, cultural or linguistic background when matching them with adopters;
- new rights for adoptive families to Adoption support - adoption leave was also being enhanced so that it matched the rights of birth parents from April 2015;
- local authorities were also required to provide adoptive families with personal budgets if they were asked to do so by the family; and
- the Act planned to give approved adopters a bigger role in the matching process by giving them access to the National Adoption Register.

The new requirements gave rise to a number of issues including the need to streamline and speed up court proceedings, pre-proceedings protocol work requirements, court timescale pressure on Social Work and LA Legal Services and the impact of emerging Case Law, namely that the test for removal was that separation should only be ordered if a child’s safety demanded immediate separation.

The main implications were summarised as follows:

- much harder to get removal of children on application to court;
- increasing numbers of children at home with parents and subject to interim care orders;
- increase in requirements for mother and baby placements / assessments (cost); and
- reduction in numbers of children being adopted.

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

26. DIGITAL INCLUSION

Ms M. Keane gave a presentation which provided details of the initiatives being promoted by the Library and Museums Service to ensure digital technology was available to all those in Bolton and particularly the hard to reach groups.

By way of background information, the report advised that approximately 20% of adults in the North West lacked the basic online skills needed to send and receive e-mails, use a search engine, browse the internet and complete online forms.

The presentation went on to outline the benefits of digital inclusion which included:

- better quality of life;
- improving education outcomes;
- improving employability;
- improving health and wellbeing; and
- reducing isolation.

Ms Keane went on to advise how the libraries were promoting digital inclusion through various initiatives which included library staff being digital champions, working in partnership with other organisations, computer mentors, improving access to online facilities in public libraries and keeping pace with technological changes.

The presentation reinforced the importance of digital inclusion as more services were moving to a primarily online offer. It was estimated however, that just fewer than 10% of the adult population may never be able to gain basic digital capabilities for various reasons and would need support to access services online.

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

27. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT – ANNUAL REPORT

Mr T. Birch gave a presentation which summarised the findings of the Educational Attainment Annual Report.

The presentation featured a number of graphs which demonstrated Bolton's performance in terms of:

- the percentage of primary pupils eligible for free school meals;
- the percentage of primary pupils whose first language was other than English;
- the number and type of first languages spoken in Bolton primary and secondary schools;
- the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 at KS2 in reading, writing and maths;
- the percentage of pupils at KS2 making expected progress from KS1 to KS2 in reading, writing and maths;
- the percentage of pupils achieving 5 A* - C GCSE's including English and maths at KS4;
- the percentage of pupils making expected progress from KS2 to KS4 in English and maths; and
- the gap between pupils eligible for Free School Meals and their peers achieving 5A* - C including English and maths.

It was noted that Free School Meals gap results had not yet been published for 2013/14 but in 2012/13, Bolton had been successful in significantly closing the gap at Key Stage 4. The gap between pupils eligible for Free School Meals and those not achieving the expected level at KS4 in Bolton was smaller than it had ever been and smaller than the national SN average.

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

28. IMPLICATIONS OF THE JAY AND COFFEY REPORTS

The Director of Children's and Adult Services submitted a report which informed the Committee of the recommendations contained within the Jay and Coffey Reports following investigations into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham and Greater Manchester.

The report advised that independent report had been commissioned in Rotherham following allegations of Child Sexual Exploitation between 1997 and 2013.

An Executive Summary of the findings of the Jay report was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the recommendations arising therefrom were provided at appendix 2.

A further independent report had been commissioned by Tony Lloyd, the Police and Crime Commissioner in Greater Manchester. The findings and recommendations of Anne Coffey, MP were provided at Appendix 3 to the report.

Mr J. Daly gave a presentation to supplement the report which summarised the position of Bolton in relation to both the Jay and Coffey reports. Particular reference was made to:

- managing risk;
- Looked after children;
- the role and activity of the Phoenix/EXIT team and the on-going joint working with Greater Manchester, including details of roles and resources;
- outcomes;
- work with victims;
- quality assurance; and
- communication and ownership of the issue.

Resolved – That Mr Daly be thanked for his informative presentation and that verbal updates be submitted to future meetings of this Committee.

29. MEMBERS BUSINESS

(a) The Committee was informed that a question had been submitted by Councillor Haworth, for consideration under Standing Order 36, viz:-

Question:

Tomorrow's Engineers is an initiative strongly promoted by the Department for Business Industry and Skills that promotes careers in engineering to boys and girls. It provides information and resources and also runs some schools programmes. Between 3rd and 7th November 2014 the second annual Tomorrows Engineers week was run which included a growing

presence on social media. Are Bolton Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics service (STEM) and Bolton Science and Technology Centre (BSTC) attracting more boys and girls to engineering careers?

Answer:

Having a skilled population is vital to maintaining the competitiveness of our economy and creating high quality jobs and Bolton's Skills Strategy seeks to improve qualification levels and address a productivity gap that can in part – both regionally and nationally - be attributed to a lack of skills. The productivity gap reduces the competitiveness of businesses and improving skill levels will create growth and jobs and enable residents to benefit from the opportunities created and play their part in society.

Delivery of Bolton's Skills Strategy includes focused activities to develop clear progression pathways to higher qualification levels (in particular Level 4+) linked to jobs and careers that are available, through both vocational (incl. apprenticeships) and academic routes. This supports raised aspirations, particularly in young people and enables them to fully consider and ultimately choose exciting careers in key sectors. Evidence does suggest that Greater Manchester faces specific skills shortages in the advanced manufacturing field – which requires a specialist workforce – especially electrical engineering; machine build engineers; skilled machine operators; welding and electrical work.

Engagement starts early and young people in Bolton can benefit from practical sessions at BSTC where primary school children experience the application of science, design, maths and technology. Bolton Council also works collaboratively with Primary Engineers, a charitable organisation that works with primary school children to develop their understanding and experience of engineering.

Within Bolton's Education Zone Bolton College's new Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Centre is dedicated to the delivery of advanced training and

apprenticeships in STEM core subjects including applied science, motor vehicle, engineering technology, design and maths that are linked to progression into both further education (and higher qualification levels) including at the University of Bolton; and employment within highly sought after and well-paid careers.

Work has also commenced in the Education Zone building the £10m University Technical College which is due to open in September 2015 to teach 14-16 year olds health sciences and engineering technologies. Employers such as Cohens Group, NHS Bolton, Medical Physics, Genix, Movetech and ElectroMech are working with teachers to ensure young people are prepared for careers in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, health, nursing and engineering. It is the only school thus far in the UK that is on University campus providing a clear line of sight from GCSE to PhD. September 2015 intake will be Year 10 (start of GCSEs) and Year 12 (start of A Levels).

Resolved – That the question submitted and the response provided be noted.

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

- The Executive Cabinet Deputy Leader's Portfolio held on 13th October and 17th November, 2014;
- Children's Services, Safeguarding and Skills PDG held on 16th October, 2014.

(The meeting started at 5.00pm and finished at 6.25 pm)