

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 21 JUNE 2012

PRESENT:- Councillors David Wood (Chair), Nick Martin (Vice-Chair), Andrew Bennett, Wayne Crabbe, Doreen Dart, Emma Faramarzi, Fay Howard, Colin Lovell, Cindy Matthews, Maureen Penny, James Robbins, Rochelle Russell and Nadine Watts.

Co-opted Representatives: - Mr Peter Crockett (Association of Swindon Special School Headteachers), Mr Dick Mattick (National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers) and Mr Peter Wells (Catholic Church Diocese).

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Penny Summers (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education), Mrs Rachael Matthey (Swindon Association of Secondary Headteacher), Mr Malcolm Barton (Church of England Diocese), Mrs Melanie Sancto (Swindon Association of Primary School Headteachers) and Mr Sam Cantlon (Swindon Youth Forum).

1. Declarations of Interest.

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

2. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Further to Minute No 40, Councillor Wayne Crabbe enquired about the average cost of an Out of Borough Placement. Sue Wald, Head of Commissioning – Children and Adults advised that there were a number of factors that affected the cost, including the needs of the child, but on average, the price of a placement was between £700 and £800 a week for a placement with an Independent Fostering Agency and £2,500 – £4,000 per week for a residential placement.

Councillor Crabbe enquired regarding the budget allocated to Out of Borough Placements. Sue Wald advised that the budget allocated to children in care placements for 2012/13 was £4m and this does not include a financial contribution from NHS Swindon nor did this include children with special educational needs. Paddy Bradley, Head Of Commissioning – Economy / Attainment explained Out of Borough placements and advised pupils were sent out of borough to receive specialist education provision. He advised that the current budget for out of borough placements was £2.3 million and this was provisioned from the dedicated school grant and not from the core budget of the Council. He further added that some funding would be recouped as Swindon provided placements for pupils from other local authorities.

3.

Public Question Time

The following questions were submitted in accordance with Standing Order 28.

Questioner

Mr Paul Sunners – Swindon Resident

Question

With reference to the Children Services Performance Report para.2.7.1 (page 13) Youth Engagement Service Activity.

The information contained within this report clearly highlights the extent to which 'youth work' in Swindon has become focussed on individual case-work with an increasingly narrow focus on young people with specific needs. Inevitably, such focus has significant resource implications for a diminishing number of youth workers and any attempt to resurrect a robust youth service available to all young people in Swindon.

In light of the long-standing concern in relation to youth provision in Swindon, will the Swindon Children Trust Board exert influence on Swindon Borough Council to adopt a creative approach to the principles contained within 'Positive for Youth – a new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19' a Government policy published in December 2011.

Response

The following response was circulated at the meeting:

The Chair of the Swindon Children's Trust Board (Liz Holmes) responded to this question at the last Children's Trust Board meeting by advising that the Board received regular reports from the Youth Service and was therefore able to monitor the scope of services provided and its ability to maintain services.

Question

Observation comment to support Question 2.

Reference 2.7.10 (page 17) Exclusions. Based on the data presented in paragraph 2 the published percentage increase is inaccurate and should read 31.5%. However, this information would appear to be erroneous based on exclusion data contained within the 'schools on-line weekly update' (28th May 2012) which clearly indicates that the total number of fixed term exclusions for the same period i.e. September 2011 to March 2012 was 918. If the previous year's total is correct i.e. 657, this means that the increase in FTE's is 39.7%. To assist any focussed analysis of the data pertaining to Fixed Term Exclusions it may have been helpful to if the 'schools on-line' information had been added as an appendix.

Question 2.

In light of the Exclusions information presented in paragraph 2.7.10 which reports a significant increase in fixed term exclusions, does this matter merit closer scrutiny?

Response

The following response was circulated at the meeting:

The Head of Commissioning – Children and Adults (Sue Wald) agrees that the percentage increase in fixed term exclusions referred to in paragraph 2.7.10 should be 31.5%. Mrs Wald also states that when the report was written it was based on the latest available data. This information was affected by when the data was actually entered by individual schools. To get an accurate comparison between the years, it would be necessary to use the official annual figures. Details are regularly reported to the Children's Trust Board and the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the monitoring process and to give an indication of the trend in numbers.

The Head of Commissioning – Economy/Attainment (Paddy Bradley) advised that the number of exclusions were increasing generally. In addition, the majority of secondary schools in the town are now academies and as most exclusions are from secondary schools, this had an impact on the data as academies had a different reporting process. Work is continuing to find a way of providing an overall picture of the situation within the town. It was suggested at the Children's Trust Board that the appropriate Scrutiny Committee be requested to investigate the issue and this is a matter for the Children & Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider as part of their work programme setting.

In response to a query from Mr Sunners, Paddy Bradley, Head Of Commissioning – Economy / Attainment confirmed that Engagement workers were commissioned to provide support for young people transitioning from school to post 16 provision, including learning and employment. He confirmed the effectiveness of the work as highlighted by Swindon's lower than national average NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures. He advised that the focus would be on raising the participation age to ensure that young people were positively engaged in education and training. He added that 'Positive for Youth' strategy and targeted work had been undertaken to support young people.

Members of the Committee commented on the various youth work being undertaken by the Local Authority and the Voluntary Sector.

4. Appointment of Co-optees

The Committee considered a report of the Director Law and Democratic Services regarding the appointment of co-optees to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2012/13.

Resolved - (1) That the appointment of Malcolm Barton as Church of England Diocese representative to the Committee be confirmed.

(2) That the appointment of Peter Wells as the Catholic Church Diocese representative to the Committee be confirmed.

(3) That the appointment of the following non-voting representatives be confirmed:

- Dick Mattick (Swindon NASUWT Branch)
- Peter Crockett (Swindon Association of Special School Headteachers)
- Penny Summers (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education)
- Melanie Sancto (Swindon Association of Primary Headteachers)
- Rachel Matthey (Swindon Association of Secondary Headteachers)

- Sam Cantlon (Swindon Youth Forum)

(4) That the appointment of a Parent Governor Representative to the Committee be submitted as and when nominations were received.

5. Children Services Performance Report

Sue Wald (Head of Commissioning – Children and Adults) presented a report updating Members of the Committee on the performance within all service commissioning, including Health Services and NHS Swindon with respect to its performance for the period to March 2012. She advised information relating to social care would be analysed and presented at a future meeting of the Committee. Members noted that the report had been structured to highlight the improvements that had been made, areas where further work would be undertaken and areas where further actions would be required to improve the programme.

Sue Wald advised that despite the deletion of the National Indicator Set, all of the data previously reported to the Department for Education had been submitted by means of statutory returns. She added that the submitted data would be a useful tool for data comparison and benefited from regular inspection by external scrutiny.

Members noted that there had been significant improvement regarding breastfeeding and this had been accomplished through the work conducted by health visitors and Children Centres to improve this indicator.

The Committee welcomed the performance improvements and noted the following points:

- The underlying reasons and trends for unauthorised absences. Paddy Bradley advised that the Council monitored data but it was the schools responsibility to monitor unauthorised absences. He added that support would be provided by education welfare officers.
- In response to a query regarding school attendance, Paddy Bradley advised that reasons for non-attendance varied and this included peer pressure.
- Caseload Management. Sara Tough advised that over the last year there had been an increase in caseloads covering children in need and children in care. Sara Tough explained the processes undertaken when children were classified In Need or Looked After and commented that the increase had implications both on the budget and in maintaining quality and levels of work. She added that the rise in numbers was the result of the complexity of circumstances in individual assessments.
- The number of Children in Care. Sara Tough advised that the number had fluctuated and peaked at 265 pupils in 2007 and current figures were similar to that period.
- In response to a query regarding the number of children adopted, Sara Tough advised that this figure had declined and this year had seen the lowest number of children being adopted. This was largely due to the circumstances related to individual cases.

Resolved - (1) That the performance data for the period end of February 2012, be noted.

(2) That a report setting out factors affecting school attendance and exclusions be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

(3) That a report setting out the number of children adopted in Swindon be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

6.

Work Programme 2012/13.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services on the results of the 2012/13 Overview and Scrutiny work programme consultation and on details regarding the priorities for Children's Services.

The Committee noted the Motion at Council on 20th June 2012, (Minute 26 of Council refers):

Councillor Bob Wright moved and Councillor Nadine Watts seconded:

"This Council notes the lack of public confidence in the Council's planning process concerning the Croft Primary School Planning Application and, in particular, whether public expertise carries equal weight to the evidence provided by the council in support of its own application.

This Council requests the Planning Committee to consider establishing an independent review of the process followed in relation to the Croft Primary School Planning Application. As part of this review, Council would like the following matters to be considered:

- Whether the planning process for the Croft School Planning Application was fair and appropriate and whether there was adequate public consultation for that application.
- Through reviewing the experiences taken from that application, whether the Swindon Borough Council planning process can demonstrate that equal treatment and weight is given to evidence submitted by the public as is given to the Council's own evidence.
- How the Council can redress the community's lack of confidence that proper consultation took place when dealing with future planning applications."

Councillor Stan Pajak moved and Councillor Ann Richards seconded that the Motion be amended to read:

"This Council notes that a planning application for Croft School was passed by Planning Committee on 29th November 2011 with no Councillors from any party voting against.

This Council acknowledges the concerns of part of the community in the Council's consultation process concerning the Croft School.

This Council supports the inclusion in the proposed work plan of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2012/13 of a review of the Croft School consultation.

This Council requests that any Task Group of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee invite two independent individuals who have no prior involvement in the process to participate in that review."

The Committee considered the report and commented on the Motion and items in the work programme including:

- The review of the consultation processes in the opening and closure of schools in Swindon. Members agreed that the scope of work to be undertaken by the Task Group should be broad to encompass the processes and how decisions were reached in terms of the information submitted. They noted that the Planning Process would not be included in this review. The Committee agreed that Croft and Highworth be used as exemplars. Members noted that the review would potentially include reviewing data to reflect why Croft and Highworth (Northview School) had been selected.

The Chair, Councillors Dart, Bennett, Penny, Martin and Robbins declared non- prejudicial involvement due to their previous connections with these projects and were unable to volunteer for the Review group.

- The effect on the overall education patterns of pupils from Swindon parents who attend out of borough schools. The Committee enquired regarding the education of Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils and asked if these were being conducted in or out of borough. Concerns were noted regarding the effect of secondary education placement choices on Swindon results. Paddy Bradley advised that information would be made available for the Committee's scrutiny covering outgoing and incoming pupil figures.
- Secondary school provision 2018 onwards. Members noted that it would be beneficial to include information regarding special schools.

Resolved: (1) That Councillors, Members and stakeholders submitting areas for consideration under this Committee's Work Programme for the Municipal Year, 2012/13, be thanked.

(2) That the Council Motion be noted.

(3) That further to (2) above, the Committee agrees to set up a Task Group to include two independent members of Standards Committee to review the processes of the opening and closure of schools with the closure of the school in Highworth and the proposal of a new school at Croft to be used as exemplars.

(4) That once the terms for the School Consultation Task Group have been agreed, they be forwarded to all members for information.

(5) That the terms of reference for the School Consultation Task Group include good practice in respect of Swindon Borough Council consultation for the opening of a new school.

(6) That Sally Smith, Scrutiny Officer submit a report to a future meeting regarding future opening and closure of schools to the Committee's attention.

(7) That Mr Keith Carby, former Independent Chair of the Council's Standards Committee be invited to serve on the School Consultation Task Group.

(8) That the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee be authorised to make Councillor appointments from members serving on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to serve on the School Consultation Task Group.

(9) That the School Consultation Task Group is operational before September 2012.

(10) That an officer submit a report to this Committee setting out the achievement of students' studying Out of Borough and how this may have affected Swindon's education data.

(11) That reports regarding (4) and (6) of the Work Programme be presented together and should include information on Special Schools and post sixteen provision.

(12) That reports regarding (1), (14) and (15) of the Work Programme be presented together.

(13) That, the Cabinet Member for Children Services be advised that Councillors Wood, Bennett, Dart, Faramazi and Robins have requested that they be kept apprised of progress made in the establishment of the University Technical College in Swindon.

(14) That officers submit a report on Youth Democracy to a future meeting of this Committee.

7. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings of the Committee during the Municipal Year 2012/13 be held on:

Wednesday, 19th September 2012, 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 21st November 2012, 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 16th January 2013, at 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 6th March 2013, at 6.00 pm