

**LIFELONG LEARNING AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
21 JUNE 2006
(7.30 - 8.50 pm)**

Present: Councillors Mrs Birch (Chairman), Thompson (Vice-Chairman),
Beadsley, Mrs Beadsley, Miss Haydon and Osborne

Mr O Dempsey, Parent Governor
Miss V Richardson, Teachers' Associations

In attendance: Tony Eccleston, Director, Education, Children's Services & Libraries
Allison Fletcher, Assistant Director, Learning, Achievement & Libraries
Alex Walters, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Victor Nichols, Assistant Chief Executive
Sandra McGinley, Head of Service, Health & Wellbeing, Children's Social
Care
Nora Dudley, Assistant Team Manager, Over 11s, Children's Social Care

Apologies for absence were received from:
Councillors Mrs Ryder and Mr G Anderson

3. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that

- (i) subject to minute 26 being amended from Councillor Beadsley to Councillor Mrs Beadsley, the minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 28 March 2006 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman;
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 10 May 2006 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or indications that members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

5. Quarterly Operations Report (Qor)

The Director of Education, Children's Services and Libraries introduced the QOR for the fourth quarter of 2005-06 and emphasised that it had been a time for making decisions and establishing the foundations for actions in 2006-07. He particularly drew attention to the establishment of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the approval of a two year schools budget, the publication of the Children and Young People's Plan and the progress made in the establishment of extended services and development of children's centres.

Highlights from the QOR included:

- i. Contractual arrangements to fund for one year an Action Research Project to develop the skills of local people to meet the needs of the regeneration of the town centre. The 'Grow Our Own' project was a new way of bringing back into the workforce people whose skills, circumstances or disability discouraged them from going back to work;
- ii. A successful Bracknell Award For Teen-Agers (BAFTA) presentation evening had been held when 86 young people received awards for involvement in a range of formally accredited activities achieved through open clubs and projects;
- iii. The election of Simon Carmichael from Easthampstead Park School as a Member of the Youth Parliament;
- iv. The challenge to continue the Young People in Sport scheme when the funding finished in March 2008;
- v. The opening of the new Crowthorne Library and the good reviews of the home library service;
- vi. The success of the Teenage Pregnancy Board in reducing the levels of teenage pregnancy in the borough;
- vii. Ranelagh School was the first school in the borough to be judged as 'outstanding' by OFSTED;
- viii. The successful introduction of the pilot phase 1 of the teaching of modern foreign languages in nine primary schools; a further nine primary schools would introduce French in phase 2 in September 2006;
- ix. As part of the 'Our World, A Song for Bracknell' initiative, next year the Bracknell Voice Choir would perform a choral work specifically written for Bracknell Forest;
- x. The publication of many new policies under the Children's Social Care Policy Framework;
- xi. The impact of the 'Jamie Oliver' effect on the negotiation of new school meals contracts which had made it difficult to find potential new suppliers;
- xii. The success of the co-ordinated admission schemes for primary and secondary schools. Admissions in September 2006 had the lowest ever number of dissatisfied parents. Applications for admission to Brakenhale had risen and had in fact doubled in recent years.

The Director or his colleagues responded to members' questions, which included the following subjects:

- i. The withdrawal of the silver bus from Crowthorne following poor levels of attendance over several months and the possibility of the bus visiting Easthampstead.
- ii. The successful recruitment of specialist staff from overseas and the support programme for them.

- iii. Information on the schools participating in the 'Cliff Richard Tennis Trials' would be sent to Councillor Beadsley. (ACTION – Allison Fletcher)
- iv. The problems with groups of youths gathering in and around Great Hollands library had abated only slightly after late Friday evening opening had been stopped. It was hoped that an alternative evening for late opening could be established.
- v. The recruitment to the Young People's Substance Misuse post.
- vi. Services for young carers were funded from government grant.
- vii. The Director stressed that it was too early to comment on the impact of the reduction by 9.3% of the adult and community learning funding for the academic year 2006-07. The National Learning and Skills Council were switching the emphasis to basic skills. Funding for lifelong learning counsellors had been cut and there were few other funding opportunities. The Director referred to the possibility of putting on an additional programme through the extended school programme. The Panel noted the new facility of a mobile computer classroom, the priority of which was to reach those who would not normally go to an adult learning site or college.
- viii. The Council had decided to fund after-school sport for two years and then to seek external sponsorship.
- ix. The restructured education welfare service was not able to undertake as much work as before, but Bracknell Forest's attendance levels were higher than the national average.

The Chairman thanked the Director and his team for their input and the clear, comprehensive report.

6. **Looked After Children**

To supplement her presentation given at the last meeting, the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care introduced a report giving more detailed information outlining the local authority's responsibilities and the current position in relation to looked after children who were leaving care. Sandra McGinley, Head of Service, Health and Wellbeing, and Nora Dudley, Over 11s' Assistant Team Manager, who were responsible for the after care of looked after young people, attended the meeting to present the report and answer any questions.

The After Care Team, based at Portman Close and consisting of the Assistant Team Leader and 2.6 social workers, was responsible for young people in or having left care and aged from 15 to 21, or 24 if in further education. Most of the work undertaken by the team involved the transition for young people into the world of independence, with the emphasis on further education, employment or training, housing, self care and other life skills.

The local authority acted as a 'good parent' and had financial and housing responsibility for those young people. The Panel noted that there were 48 young people, those aged 16 to 18 or in further education being fully supported and those over 18 either working or on state benefits.

In response to questions posed by members:

- i. The Panel was advised that those leaving care had priority for supported accommodation at Rainforest Walk and that a supported and sheltered lodging scheme was being rolled out to all vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds. REAP, who provided support to care leavers preparing to leave supported accommodation, worked closely with Housing under a joint SLA which resulted in economies.
- ii. The team worked closely with CAMHS to provide a holistic service through to adulthood.

The Chairman thanked the officers for an interesting report.

7. **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME WITH REGARD TO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN**

The Panel was asked to consider the future work programme and priorities with particular regard to the Children and Young People's Plan, with a view to commencing an investigation in September. It was acknowledged that some subjects may be too delicate for non-professionals to probe. The four priorities identified in the Plan were:

- i. Children and young people engage in positive community and voluntary activities.
- ii. Children and young people have a range of choices of things to do and places to go.
- iii. Children and young people participate in decision making and in supporting the community
- iv. Enable all children and young people to access wider community activities before and after school hours and in school holidays.

It was suggested that consideration be given to undertaking a piece of work on the subject of young people making a positive contribution to the community and to society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour, for example through voluntary or community activities. It was also suggested that members look at the current arrangements for youth provision in Bracknell Forest and what might be provided or promoted in the future.

It was thought that such an investigation could positively raise the profile of young people in the community. **The Panel AGREED to establish a working group on youth provision consisting of Councillors Beadsley, Miss Haydon and Osborne and Mr Dempsey.**

8. **LIBRARIES WORKING GROUP**

The Chairman introduced an interim report of the Libraries Working Group on the review of libraries, looking at library stock, facilities and locations to ensure that they were fit for purpose and met users' current and future needs with a view to increasing library usage and book reading. The report gave members background on the scope

which was included as annex A and included input into the library facility to form part of the civic hub.

Future activity included:

- i. Visits to libraries which had not already been visited and surveyed, including the new Crowthorne and Bracknell central libraries.
- ii. Possible visits to libraries outside the borough.
- iii. Visits to residential homes to ascertain satisfaction with the mobile library service.
- iv. The impact of usage of PCs in libraries.
- v. The type of volunteers utilised by the library and information service.

The working group hoped to report in September, with findings and recommendations seeking to inform future library provision associated with the proposed civic hub and encourage the development of the library and information service to meet the needs of the 21st century whilst encouraging a reversal of any downward trend in reading.

The officers would explore the feasibility of holding the next meeting of the Panel in one of the libraries.

9. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS

The Assistant Chief Executive gave an oral update on the administration of grants to the community and voluntary sector following the review undertaken by the former Lifelong Learning Partnership in 2004. Despite constraints in this year's budget, approximately £370k of community grant aid was distributed this year. However the impact of budgetary cuts and the teething troubles from the new system resulted in a small number of errors in grant administration.

The Panel noted the problem areas associated with the Council's budget cuts and, to prevent it happening in future years, procedures had been introduced to the grant guidelines stating that departmental funding officers were responsible for letting applicants know the status of their application.

The Panel asked for a similar update next year and for this to be given a little earlier in the municipal year.

10. EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN

The Panel noted the forthcoming items on the Executive Forward Plan relating to Education, Children's Services and Libraries.

The Director gave details of the re-tendering of the school meals service.

CHAIRMAN