

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & LEARNING
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
17 APRIL 2013
7.30 - 9.35 PM**



Present:

Councillors Mrs Birch (Chairman), Allen, Brossard, Gbadebo, Heydon, Kensall, Mrs McCracken and Mrs Temperton

Mr R Briscoe, Parent Governor Representative
Miss V Richardson, Teachers' Representative

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Hamilton, Ms Hayes and Dr Barnard

Also Present:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)
Lorna Hunt, Chief Officer: Children's Social Care
Dr Janette Karklins, Director of Children, Young People & Learning
Bob Welch, Chief Adviser: Learning & Achievement
Karen Frost, Early Years Childcare & Play Manager
Rosanna Border, Senior Advisor
Sheila McKeand, Head of Service for Looked After Children
Kashif Nawaz, Deputy Assistant Virtual School Head for Looked After Children

41. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Allen for Councillor Ms Hayes.

42. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 16 January 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Panel received and noted previously circulated information pertaining to Short Break Care and the Youth Offending Service's prevention service.

Matters arising

- Following input from the Panel on the Annual Admissions Arrangements 2014/15 siblings had been categorised as a social criteria in the new policy. A move that should help ensure that the younger siblings of children placed in a school that was not their Designated Area School were not disadvantaged when it came to consideration of their applications to the same school as their sibling.

43. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest nor any indications that Members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

44. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

45. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

46. Bracknell Forest Youth Council

In the absence of the Bracknell Forest Youth Council it was agreed that this item would be deferred to the Panel's next meeting.

47. Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel

The Panel were provided with a briefing on the work of the Life Chances Team which had been operational since October 2011.

The Life Chances Team was a virtual team of professionals with responsibility for looked after children drawn from a wide range of services including Early Years, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the Youth Service, the Youth Offending Service, education and social workers. The Team's work focused on two key priorities: ensuring that resources were effectively and efficiently deployed and providing a service that met the needs of the looked after child in an effective and timely manner; work carried out through the early identification and addressing of problems.

The health, education and placement of all looked after children were continuously monitored and if a child was registered as having issues with two or more of these areas at any one time then additional support was put in place to help solve the problems. If at the Team's next monthly meeting the issue has not been resolved then monitoring and action would continue. If an issue is found to be a common one for the group then this was examined in more detail as a separate piece of work.

Since the Team's inception there had been a number of positive developments including the development of more effective links between agencies, a reduction in the number of education issues recorded and the better understanding of the needs of all vulnerable children. Foster carers had also reported that they feel better supported and that they feel better able to foster children with more complex needs. The development of the Team has also provided a model and a catalyst for resource development in other areas.

The Panel was informed that a Central Government Cross Party Working Group had identified the presence of a designated looked after children governor on a school governing body as being an example of best practice. It was hoped that introducing this across schools in Bracknell Forest would help drive the work of the Life Chances Team forward. The Panel acknowledged the good sense of this suggestion and agreed that the matter would be looked at by the Panel's School Governance Working Group.

The Panel requested an update on the work of the Life Chances Team in six months time.

The Panel congratulated the Life Chances Team for the positive difference that they were making to Looked After Children.

48. **Quarterly Service Report**

Karen Frost, Head of Prevention and Early Intervention, gave a presentation in respect of Family Focus the Government's Troubled Families initiative.

The programme, initiated in January 2012, was a three year programme which would introduce a systemic change to the way that families that incurred a high cost to the public purse were engaged with and helped. In the first year of the project the Council had engaged with 42 of the 115 families in Bracknell Forest identified as meeting two or more of the criteria set out by Central Government including involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour and children not attending school plus any locally decided criteria including domestic violence, mental health issues and neglect. A further 58 families would be engaged with during the current year.

On a day to day basis the initiative was being run by a virtual frontline team of experts meeting to monitor progress on a fortnightly basis. Additional support was provided by a multi-agency project team that met three times a year and a stakeholder group acting as a Project Board to provide additional support and guidance when problems occurred. Each family on the programme was assigned a named worker who worked with the family helping to resolve problems on a holistic basis. The named worker was also responsible for co-ordinating meetings and ensuring that there was a single family plan reducing the number of visits that a family received from professionals.

The project was well supported by all partner agencies involved and a robust system was being put in place that would enable the secure sharing of case files. A move that would further enhance the partnership working already taking place. Extensive training had been put in place for front line staff to help them improve the way that they engaged with families and this was starting to pay dividends.

It was noted that schools were, through their Family Support Advisors, aware of families involved in the Family Focus project. Where schools did not have Family Support Advisors the development of appropriate links would be explored.

It was agreed that that data relating to the number of Bracknell Forest families within the project meeting the various national criteria would be circulated to the Panel.

The Panel thanked Karen Frost for her update and it was agreed that the presentation would be circulated to the Panel. It was requested that updates were brought to future Panel meetings.

The Panel received an update on the provision of Youth Services within the Borough with a particular focus on the on-going modernisation of the service which aimed to provide the young people of Bracknell Forest with a mix of targeted provision and open access youth centres that provided a wide range of activities. Work tied in with the key outcomes of the Get Us Involved consultation of young people which had highlighted three areas for development: increasing the involvement of young people, providing young people with the opportunity to participate in activities that they wouldn't normally get the opportunity to do and to give young people the opportunity to try out new activities on an informal fun basis without having to worry about whether they are good at the activity.

To help improve the targeting and quality of advice given to young people on a range of matters youth workers were being asked to become the designated youth worker with responsibility for particular key areas including: substance misuse, sexual health and relationships and Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme. Knowledge that would be shared with young people through youth centres and the schools.

It was noted that, although the Youth Services had seen its budget reduced by £405,000 since 2011/12 and three youth centres had been closed, the number of young people accessing youth service provision had only fallen by a relatively small level, from 3569 different individuals in 2011/12 to 3234 individuals in 2012/13, and the number of young people achieving a recognised award through the Youth Service e.g. Berkshire Awards, Duke of Edinburgh Award had increased from 2399 in 21011/12 to 2748 in 2012/13. Statistics that were testament to the provision available and the quality of the work undertaken by youth workers.

Arsing from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Contracts with external service providers would include provisions that would enable the Council to monitor and quality assure the standard of the service provided
- Many voluntary organisations providing activities for young people wanted support to help them deal with specific topics and it was questioned whether it might be possible to put a system in place that would enable Youth Workers to train and share their knowledge with volunteers
- The Government had recently published Working Together 2013 and the Local Safeguarding Children Board would be working through the implications of the new Section 11 guidance for voluntary and community groups
- The Panel commended the quality of the provision at the Wayz Youth Club
- It was agreed that updates would be given at future meetings

The Panel considered the Quarterly Service Report for the third quarter (October to December) of 2012/13 and the following points were noted:

- Examples of compliments as well as complaints would be included in future Quarterly Service Reports
- Bracknell Forest's attainment of being 40th (out of 150) best authority in the Country for the percentage of pupils attending a good or outstanding primary school was to be commended. It was acknowledged that more should be done to celebrate this achievement particularly in relation to the Borough's economic development
- The Panel noted the outcomes of the current and previous Ofsted inspections of Bracknell Forest schools

49. **Changes Affecting Special Educational Needs**

Rosanna Border, Senior Advisor, provided a briefing on the emerging statutory reform programme in relation to children and young people with special educational needs (SEN).

The reforms were currently going through the second stage of the Parliamentary Committee process and it was expected that the majority of the changes set out in the legislation would be implemented through clauses within Section 3 of the Children and Families Bill that would receive Royal Assent in mid 2014.

The key changes that the Children and Families Bill would introduce were:

- The age range of those eligible for SEN to be increased from 19 years to 25 years old
- The replacement of statements and learning difficulty assessments with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)

- The introduction of a statutory requirement to involve young people and families in the assessment process, the development and review of the local offer and in reviewing SEN provision
- The introduction of a mediation advisor to support those appealing to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal
- The introduction of the option of personal budgets enabling families to manage their child's SEN package

Although the authority would not be developing EHCPs until clear guidance about what they would require had been published work was already taking place to develop the systems already in place to enable changes to progress in advance of the legislation. Positive feedback had been given on pilot projects already in place including work with families at Holly Spring Schools to review the local SEN offer available.

The Panel questioned whether schools had the resources available to meet the ongoing budget pressures particularly in light of the presumption that schools and colleges would have to meet up to the first £6,000 of additional costs incurred for each child's SEN Provision. Officers acknowledged the Panel's concerns and stressed that this figure was on top of the existing pupil funding received by schools and officers were working to develop more creative ways of delivering the SEN service. Staff were also working closely with those mainstream schools with high SEN levels. It was also noted that SEN needs often reduced over time as the focus moved to encouraging a child's independence and self advocacy as they grew older. In addition, work undertaken at Kennel Lane and College Hall had found that often a child's SEN needs weren't just about the requirement for additional equipment or material resources and that the attitudes of teachers had a far greater impact on their ability to learn.

The Panel was reassured that the method of funding used for Special Schools would remain unchanged with Kennel Lane School being funded on the basis of £10,000 per pupil plus top up funding according to need and provision would be put into place to charge pupils who lived outside the Borough at a set cost. Notwithstanding this officers would continue to monitor the situation to ensure that funding was equitable and that educational resources met the needs of pupils. It was agreed that the Panel would monitor the situation.

The Panel was informed that autism and social and communication problems were the main growth areas for SEN diagnosis and that the Local Authority remained committed to early identification and intervention through the Margaret Wells Furby Centre. To help ensure that any potential problems were picked up as early as possible in a child's life early years practitioners were receiving training to help them identify any social development or language skills problems. It was confirmed that funding for testing of two year olds came from the Department of Health.

It was agreed that the presentation would be circulated to the Panel.

The Panel thanked Rosanna Border for her update, wished her well in her forthcoming retirement and thanked her for all the positive work that she had carried out for the Borough over the years.

50. Education Transport Policy 2014/15

The Panel received a report containing a draft of the Education Transport Policy 2014/15 which they had been given an opportunity to comment on previously.

It was confirmed that if a child was allocated a place at a school that was not its designated area school and the school had not been named as a preference when applying for a place then the local authority would pay for the child's transport to and from school.

It was agreed that the number of children being provided with transport and the cost of this provision would be circulated to the Panel.

51. Working Group Update Report

The Panel received a report providing an update on the progress made to date by the Working Group of the Panel reviewing school governance.

It was reported that the review was drawing to a conclusion and a questionnaire had been circulated to head teachers to gather their views of the effectiveness of the structures in place.

Volunteers were requested for a Working Group to review the provision of school places. It was agreed that the Working Group would consist of Councillors Mrs Birch, Kensall, Mrs McCracken and Mrs Temperton and Mr R Briscoe.

52. Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions

The Panel noted the scheduled Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions relating to Children, Young People and Learning.

CHAIRMAN