

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & LEARNING
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
12 JANUARY 2011
7.30 - 9.30 PM**



Present:

Councillors Mrs Birch (Chairman), Ms Whitbread (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Beadsley, Mrs Fleming, Mrs McCracken, Osborne and Phillips

Ms C Mitchell, Children's Social Care Representative
Miss V Richardson, Teachers Associations Representatives

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Dudley, Kensall and Mrs Ryder
Mr G S Anderson, Church Representative

Executive Members:

Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children and Young People
Councillor Kendall, Executive Member for Education

Also Present:

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview and Scrutiny
Janette Karklins, Director of Children, Young People and Learning
Penny Reuter, Chief Officer: Children's Social Care
Katharine Simpson, Democratic Services Officer
Martin Surrell, Senior Advisor (Secondary Education)
David Watkins, Chief Officer: Performance and Resources
Bob Welch, Chief Officer: Learning and Achievement

30. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Mrs Fleming for Councillor Mrs Ryder.

31. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 27 October 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

There were no matters arising. It was noted that the information requested at the last meeting had been circulated to members.

32. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest relating to any items on the agenda, nor any indications that members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

33. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

34. Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel

The Panel noted the minutes of the meetings of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel held on 29 September 2010 and 15 December 2010.

35. 2011/12 Draft Budget Proposals

The Director of Children, Young People and Learning presented a report on the key themes and priorities for the Children, Young People and Learning Department as outlined in the Council's Draft Budget Proposals for 2011/12. The key themes included draft budget pressures, draft budget savings, draft budget net position, capital spend, staffing implications, and fees, charges and other income.

The Panel was informed that the draft budget proposals had been developed before the Council had received notification of its final financial settlement from Central government. This settlement had now been received and work was taking place to ensure that proposals were in line with the settlement.

One of the most significant budgetary developments for the Department was the amalgamation of a number of grants into a single Early Intervention Grant and the removal of ringfencing. A move that gave greater flexibility in the way that funding could be spent.

The Government had placed a significant emphasis on the importance of early intervention and prevention work and these areas featured strongly in the draft proposals.

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

- Figures in the 2011/12 Commitment Budget for Senior Management Restructure related to the restructure of the team following the departure of senior officers during 2009/10.
- Savings proposed in the Education Welfare Service would focus on the organisation surrounding the front line staff. The Council's statutory education welfare role would be maintained
- Changes to the contract for advocacy and independent visiting would enable the provision of a spot service from a range of experienced providers which would be more appropriate to the Council's requirements than the previous service
- The reduction of 0.6FTE staff at the Larchwood Short Break Care Centre would be through the loss of ancillary staff and not those staff working directly with the children using the service
- The proposed saving in the cost of care and support for looked after children were a result of children naturally moving through the care system
- The loss of 1.0FTE post in the Student Finance Section had been a planned redundancy following the centralisation of the student loans application service
- A long term strategy was being developed for the delivery of speech and language therapy services. More details would be circulated to members
- There had been no business case to continue funding the Family Tree Nursery and following consultation with families and staff it had been recommended that the Council close the Nursery on 31 March 2011. The associated report would be circulated to members

The Panel stressed that they understood the need to make cut backs but expressed a wish that consideration be given to reinstating any services that had been reduced as soon as possible.

The Panel thanked the Director for her report and noted the draft budget proposals.

36. **Performance Monitoring Report**

The Senior Advisor for Secondary Education gave a presentation in respect of departmental performance with reference to the Performance Monitoring Report for the second quarter (July to September) of 2010/11 with a particular focus on 14-16 years education offering and take up and school exclusions.

The presentation included details of: recent developments, the current curriculum offer, 2010 GCSE performance data and new performance measures including details of the newly introduced English Baccalaureate. The Chief Officer: Learning and Achievement undertook to circulate further details of this qualification.

The Schools White Paper had confirmed that reviews of vocational qualifications and the secondary National Curriculum would take place and that the age of compulsory participation in education or training would be raised to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015. The Coalition Government had also withdrawn the requirement that all young people were to have access to a revised education entitlement including the full range of Diplomas.

The percentage of pupils achieving GCSE grades A* to C in English stood at 68.5% and the percentage achieving GCSE Grades A* to C in maths stood at 63.6%. This was an increase on the previous year's results.

Outturns for the new English Baccalaureate qualification were based on achievements in a narrow combination of subjects. It was stressed that schools were being asked to ensure that while remaining mindful of the requirements of this new qualification they continued to provide a broad and varied curriculum offer that met the requirements of young people

During the 2009/10 academic year there had been 15 permanent exclusions which represented 0.09% of the total school pupil cohort. The Chief Officer: Learning and Achievement said that the vast majority of students were well behaved. There had been a noticeable fall in the number of fixed term exclusions compared to previous years; something that was attributed to the early intervention work that was taking place with schools. The number of fixed term exclusions had also fallen over the four year reporting period. During the 2009/10 academic year there had been 441 fixed term exclusions however it was stressed that when a child had been excluded on multiple occasions these were counted as separate exclusions.

The Panel expressed concern about the work that schools set for pupils subject to exclusions lasting for longer than one day. It was agreed that this concern would be followed up with schools.

The Panel congratulated teaching staff on the support work that they carried out with pupils to try to prevent exclusions.

37. **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2009/10**

The Chief Officer: Performance and Resources introduced the 2009/10 Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Service performed a key role in assuring the quality of the local authority's care planning for looked after children. The report, the fifth annual report produced by the Service, highlighted examples of good practice and identified learning areas.

Of particular note was the high level of child participation in reviews. As at 31 March 2010, 93% of looked after children had participated in their reviews. The number of looked after children either chairing or co-chairing their reviews was also considered encouraging. The report also highlighted a number of positive comments made by children and young people about their social workers and foster carers.

It was noted that there had been a 12% increase in the number of looked after children over the course of the reporting period and this placed additional pressure on the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The current Independent Reviewing Officer had a large volume of experience however the officer had decided to take a career break. Something that the Department acknowledged would be a particular challenge.

The Panel expressed concern at the placements made outside of the Bracknell Forest area. It was stressed that out of borough placements were used where either a child had complex needs that could only be met through specialised provision which was not available locally or in cases where a child needed to be removed from the area for personal reasons. In the case of the child placed in Lancashire although one parent was located in Bracknell Forest the other lived in Manchester and this enabled a familial relationship to be maintained.

Using Social Workers in the local area to supervise looked after children placed out of Borough was not felt to be appropriate. The Council retained legal and financial responsibility for looked after children when they were placed out of borough and Bracknell based social workers were able to provide continuity of care to the child and helped the child to maintain social links to Bracknell Forest.

The Panel congratulated the Department on the positive outcomes of the report.

38. **Schools White Paper: The Importance of Teaching and Public Health White Paper: Healthy Lives, Healthy People**

The Panel noted the briefing report in respect of the Schools White Paper, which sought to introduce a reform programme that placed teachers at the centre of school improvement and released schools from central government control, and the Public Health White Paper, which set out the Government's long term vision for the future of public health in England.

The Panel were informed that the implementation of the Public Health White Paper, which included significant changes for the NHS and local authorities would be monitored by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

39. **Report of the Review of Safeguarding Children**

The Lead member for the Working Group of the Panel reviewing safeguarding children presented the Working Group's draft report.

The report would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for adoption at their meeting on 27 January 2011 and would be formally sent to the Executive Member for Children and Young People for comment.

The Panel congratulated the Working Group for carrying out a particularly comprehensive review of safeguarding children and the production of a thorough report which highlighted areas of good practice and areas for development.

It was suggested that the report might be made available to a wider audience as an example of good practice.

The Working Group thanked officers for the time that they had given to support the review.

It was agreed that the Panel Chairman would accompany the Lead Member when the report was presented to the Children's Safeguarding Board.

RESOLVED that, subject to the changes circulated to members in advance of the meeting, the report of the review of safeguarding be commended to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for adoption and sent formally to the Executive Member for Children and Young People.

40. **Report of the Review of School Meals**

The Lead Member for the Working Group reviewing school meals provided a verbal update on their work so far.

It was reported that the Working Group had, to date, visited and eaten at two secondary schools and three primary schools. Visits to the remaining secondary schools and a number of primary schools had been planned. Feedback had already been given on a number of areas and schools were already implementing a number of suggestions.

The review was proving to be particularly interesting and it was expected that a report would be brought to the Panel's June meeting.

41. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Panel noted the forthcoming items relating to Children, Young People and Learning on the Executive Forward Plan.

CHAIRMAN

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