

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & LEARNING
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
15 JUNE 2011
7.30 - 9.35 PM**



Present:

Councillors Mrs Birch (Chairman), Ms Whitbread (Vice-Chairman), Gbadebo, Ms Hayes, Heydon, Kensall, Mrs McCracken, Sargeant, Mrs Temperton and Dr Barnard
Ms C Mitchell, Children's Social Care Representative

Ms S Cauchi, Parent Governor Representative
Miss V Richardson, Teachers Representative

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr D Moss, Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth

Executive Members:

Councillors Dr Barnard

Also Present:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny)
Sandra Davies, Community Safety Officer
Karen Frost, Head of Early Years Childcare & Play
Dr Janette Karklins, Director of Children, Young People & Learning
David Watkins, Chief Officer: Performance & Resources
Alex Walters, Assistant Director, Education, Children's Services & Libraries
Bob Welch, Chief Advisor: Learning & Achievement

1. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs Birch be elected Chairman of the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2011/12 Municipal Year

COUNCILLOR MRS BIRCH IN THE CHAIR

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Ms Whitbread be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 12 January 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

There were no matters arising.

4. **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.

5. **Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

6. **Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel**

The Panel noted the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel held on 9 March 2011.

The Panel was informed that bursaries for care leavers in higher education were given when money was required in advance for example to pay accommodation and rent deposits. Care leavers were able to access these bursaries via their designated social worker.

It was clarified that social workers followed statutory regulations relating to minimum contact requirements when dealing with looked after children placed out of area. It was stressed that the Children's Social Care Section considered these to be minimum requirements and social workers were expected to exceed them in all cases.

7. **Performance Monitoring Report**

The Panel received a presentation from Alex Austin and Georgia Robson of the Bracknell Forest Youth Council.

The Bracknell Forest Youth Council was set up in 2001 to provide young people aged between 11 and 19 years old with an opportunity to help improve Bracknell Forest for all young people. The Youth Council consisted of 18 people (9 male and 9 female) aged between 12 and 17 years old who had been elected by their peers. The Council met on a weekly basis with members often working on projects in their own time between meetings.

The Youth Council provided young people in Bracknell Forest with a forum where they could raise their concerns about services in the Borough with key members and officers at the Borough Council. Many members joined because they felt that young people were being misrepresented amongst the general population and wanted to do something to change this. The Youth Council worked on a variety of projects that young people felt passionately about and helped shape national debate through the UK Youth Parliament.

Locally the Youth Council had run many different events and programmes including the Youth parliament elections, an annual residential trip and had set up of a voucher scheme which gave young people the opportunity to access a number of different activities including ice-skating, swimming, golf and bowling at reduced prices.

At a strategic level the Youth Council had been involved in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan and had researched and produced a DVD on domestic violence for the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). This had been well received when it was presented at the recent LSCB Conference. Members of the Youth Council had also been involved in the recruitment of the Director of

Children, Young People and Learning and the Chief Officer: Children's Social Care. The Panel requested that the Domestic Violence DVD be shown at their next meeting.

The Panel congratulated the Youth Council on their success and noted their importance to the Council when it came to gathering the views and opinions of young people.

The Panel received an update in respect of the stability of foster care placements. It was reported that the Borough Council currently fulfilled the Corporate Parent role for 94 children. A figure which when quoted per 10,000 children placed Bracknell Forest at half the national average.

One of the most challenging aspects of the service for the Children's Social Care Team was ensuring stability of placements. It was reported that 60% of looked after children who had been looked after continuously for at least two and half years had lived in the same placement for at least two years. The number of looked after children who had moved placements three or more times in the past year stood at 8.0% a figure that equated to approximately four children. It was accepted that there would be movement in the foster care system, often due to themed for initial emergency placement, however staff worked hard to minimise disruptions.

It was noted that a small proportion of children were placed out of the Borough. This could be due to either a child having family connections in another area or having complex needs that required very specialised service that was not available locally.

The Director of Children, Young People and Learning reported that the Children's Social Care Section had just been subject to a two day unannounced inspection by OFSTED. Initial feedback from the Inspectors had been largely positive and no area had given significant cause for concern. The final report, scheduled for publication in July, would cover areas of statutory practice, note strengths and set out any key issues that need to be addressed.

It was noted that the percentage of young people aged 16 – 18 classified as being not in education, employment or training (NEET) had risen. It was stressed that this was due to changes in the way that the calculations were carried out and in number terms the figures were decreasing. The number of NEETs currently stood at 155.

The Panel congratulated the Department on its hard work and success.

8. **2010-2011 ANNUAL REPORT - CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS**

The Panel received the annual report of the statutory complaints function for Children's Social Care, following its approval by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning.

The Complaints Service performed an important role in assuring the quality of response to children and young people or parents and carers who made complaints. The annual report supported the continuing development and review of the service and learning from complaints.

The report included details of the number and nature of complaints received by the department, and how learning from the complaints received was taken forward to

improve practice where appropriate. During the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, 22 complaints were received within Children's Social Care, of which 1 was fully upheld, 6 were partially upheld and the remaining 15 were not upheld.

The nature of the complaints included the following:

- 3 in respect of access to services
- 6 in respect of service procedures
- 12 in respect of service standards
- 1 in respect of staff attitude/conduct

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

- Although the number of complaints received was going down those that were received were becoming increasingly complex in their nature
- Children's Social Care aimed to resolve any issues as soon as they were made aware of them. In cases where this was not possible the statutory complaints procedure was followed
- It was unusual to receive no complaints directly from the child receiving the service. Children were encouraged to share their views and a number of measures were in place to help them to do so
- An independent advocacy service was available to provide support to children making a complaint
- Social workers were trained to deal with complaints
- 22 compliments were received during the period reported. Many of these commented on the professionalism of social workers in carrying out their duties and their clarity in explaining their role
- The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer explained the process for dealing with complaints and the latest version could be accessed via the following weblink: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/independent-reviewing-officer-service-report-2009-to-2010.pdf>

The Panel noted the report.

9. **Child Poverty Strategy**

The Panel received a presentation on the development of 'Breaking the Cycle' the Council's Child Poverty Strategy from the Head of Performance and Governance and the Early Years and Childcare Manager.

The key aim of the Child Poverty Strategy was to ensure a co-ordinated approach to addressing child poverty and to minimise the effects of child poverty across the Borough, using a network of partner organisations. It had been a significant piece of work and was underpinned by a detailed needs assessment. Research had found that although the picture in Bracknell Forest was overwhelmingly positive there were pockets of deprivation spread across the Borough and of the 28,000 children living in Bracknell Forest 2,500 children, living in 1,400 families, were classified as living in poverty.

For a child to be classified as living in poverty they needed to be either living in families dependent on out of work benefits or in families in receipt of tax credits whose reported income was less than 60% of median income. Nationally the median annual income was £16,000 however in Bracknell Forest this median annual income rose to £18,000.

Child poverty was not evenly spread across the Borough. The highest concentration of children in poverty was to be found in the central wards and the lowest concentrations in the northern and southern wards. Great Hollands North had the highest levels of poverty at 23.3% and Warfield Harvest Ride had the lowest levels at 3%.

The Strategy's underpinning priority to increase awareness and challenge perceptions of child poverty and build a framework for the future was supported by the following three outcome priorities:

- To raise the family income of those families living in poverty
- To mitigate the impacts of living in poverty
- To improve outcomes for children and young people, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty

It was recognised that this would be a substantial undertaking which would require often very deep rooted behaviours to be tackled.

Arising from the Panel's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- The most up to date verifiable figures for comparative data of the number of children in poverty were only available to 2008. More up to date data would be circulated when it was available
- It was felt that the number of children living in poverty had increased in recent years and to obtain an understanding of how figures had changed since 2008 a range of local indicators were used including free school meal eligibility
- Eligibility for free school meals was considered to be a key indicator for child poverty and a significant amount of work was being done to encourage families to claim their entitlement
- The primary reason for many families approaching local food banks for help was due to delays in receiving benefits payments
- In 2010, local food banks had experienced difficulties in meeting the rise in demand over the summer holiday period. This had been due to the unavailability of free school meals during the school holidays and contingency plans had been put in place to ensure that additional food would be available this year
- Areas with greater deprivation had more elaborate and more established support networks in place
- Breaking the cycle of poverty of opportunity was considered to be a key constituent of removing families from poverty and it would be necessary to look at how successful the Council was at achieving this for example through early intervention
- Improving outcomes for children by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty would be the most difficult outcome priority because it relied on changing deeply rooted behaviour patterns

The Panel thanked the officers for an excellent piece of work.

10. **Response of the Executive and the Local Safeguarding Children Board to 'Being Safe' - The Report of the Review of Safeguarding Children and Young People**

The Panel considered a report detailing responses received from the Executive and the Local Safeguarding Children Board in respect of the report of the Review of Safeguarding Children and Young People carried out by a Working Group of the Panel

It was reported that the Executive had agreed the majority of the Working Group's recommendations. It was noted that Recommendation 7: the reinstatement of an officer post to give full-time focused attention to teenage pregnancy issues had been partially agreed. It had been felt that developing a co-ordinated approach to tackling teenage pregnancy would be more effective at ensuring all relevant agencies were involved than relying on a single post holder.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board had already implemented a number of the recommendations proposed by the Working Group.

The Panel agreed that a follow up review would be carried out at a later date to monitor the implementation of recommendations.

The Chairman congratulated the Working Group on an excellent piece of work that had been held up as an exemplar of good practice nationally.

11. Working Group Update Report

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 been providing feedback directly to the Children, Young People and Learning Department and a number of recommendations had been implemented already. A meeting with the School Meals Provider had been particularly informative and the contract holder was investigating suggested changes to the service offered for example changes that could improve the uptake of free school meals and the introduction of picture menus.

12. Work Programme 2011/12

The Panel considered a report detailing the proposed draft work programme for Overview and Scrutiny in 2011/12.

It was agreed that a Working Group would be set up to review the arrangements for the Common Assessment Framework in Children's Social Care. It was agreed that this review would be short with a completion date in October 2011. Members of the Working Group would be made up of: Councillors Mrs Birch, Ms Hayes, Mrs McCracken, Mrs Temperton and Mrs Mitchell. It was agreed that a review of school governance would follow and that the review of English as an Additional Language had been completed.

13. Executive Forward Plan

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

I029218: School Meals Procurement Plan

The Panel was informed that the current contract for the provision of school meals would expire at the end of this academic year. To improve the number of potential bidders for the contract it had been agreed to work with other local authorities on a joint approach. This would improve choice and enable the Council to take advantage of greater economies of scale.

To ensure that the procurement plan was suitably robust before the council went out to tender the current school meals contract had been extended for a further year and the new tender would take effect from September 2012.

CHAIRMAN

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