

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LEARNING
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
10 JUNE 2009
7.30 - 9.32 PM**



Present:

Councillors Mrs Beadsley, Mrs Birch (Chairman), Dudley, Mrs Fleming, Kensall, Mrs McCracken, Osborne, Simonds and Ms Whitbread (Vice-Chairman)
Mr G S Anderson, Church Representative
Dr P Josephs-Franks, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Ryder

Also Present:

1. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs Birch be elected Chairman of the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year 2009/10.

COUNCILLOR MRS BIRCH IN THE CHAIR

2. Appointment of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Ms Whitbread be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year 2009/10.

3. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following Substitute Member:

Councillor Mrs Fleming for Councillor Mrs Ryder.

4. Minutes and Matters Arising

The Panel noted the minutes of the former Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 25 March 2009.

Matters Arising:

Minute 57: Performance Monitoring Report

Janet Hughes, Connexions Manager, gave a presentation on the work being undertaken to reduce the number of young people aged between 16 and 19 years old, in Bracknell Forest who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Under the terms of the Local Area Agreement, the Council had agreed with central government that the number of young people in Bracknell Forest who were NEET would in 2008/09 be reduced to 5.0%. On 31 January 2009, the percentage of young people in Bracknell Forest classified as NEET stood at 6.9%, with the highest concentration living in the Old Bracknell ward. Compared to the five other Berkshire unitary authorities: Bracknell Forest had the second highest proportion of young people classified as being NEET (Reading had the highest proportion) and the lowest proportion of young people in a learning position.

The most recent annual survey of year 11 school leavers had found that: 90.7% were in education, 0.5% (equivalent to 6 young people) were in training, 5.8% (65 young people) were in short term placements or training programmes and 4.8% (or 54 young people) were classified as being NEET.

Connexions ran a range of programmes locally to assist this group back into education, employment or training including: making regular contact with individuals to offer advice and support, encouraging participation in voluntary activities, providing opportunities to participate in accredited health and safety training, Rapid English courses to improve literacy and numeracy skills, activity days and the LEAP Project, a ten week programme which provided young people with the opportunity to take part in team building activities, develop social skills, art projects and work placements. Connexions had also liaised with education providers and Capita when delays in the payment of the Educational Maintenance Allowance had been brought to its attention.

The Panel thanked Janet Hughes for her comprehensive presentation.

5. 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.

6. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

7. Performance Monitoring Report

The Director of Social Care and Learning presented the Performance Monitoring Report (PMR) for the fourth quarter of 2008/09 for the Social Care and Learning Department.

The PMR provided the final performance outturns for the year 2008/09. It was reported that data for a number of performance indicators was missing because the data was either collected once a year through an annual survey or the Council were dependant on other organisations to provide data. Technical definitions for a number

of indicators had not yet been agreed by Central Government and the Council was awaiting information as to what would be measured.

The PMR covered the whole Social Care and Learning Department and work was taking place to split future PMRs into two; one specific for Adult Social Care and one specific to Children's Services and Learning which would make future scrutiny more straightforward.

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

- Work was taking place with partner organisations to resolve issues over outstanding data.
- A number of the performance indicators were set by Central Government and data had to be collected for these indicators even if they were not considered to be particularly relevant to the area.
- The composition of staff at College Hall Pupil Referral Unit had been changed to bring in a wider range of expertise. College Hall currently had only one vacancy which had been caused by the promotion of one of the teachers to the position of Deputy Head.
- Recent activities to recruit additional short break foster carers had been successful and new applicants were now being assessed.
- The demand for foster placements for adolescents and children with complex needs exceeded the number of placements available and children continued to be placed outside the Borough and this was impacting on resources.
- The implementation of the Vetting and Barring Scheme had been delayed until July 2010. The situation was being monitored by the Department and Criminal Records Bureau checks were still being carried out.
- Resource issues meant that the appointment of a member of staff to manage the external placement contracts of looked after children was not progressing as quickly as had been hoped.
- Details of primary school admissions for September 2009 would be circulated to the Panel.

8. Statutory Annual Report for Children's Social Care Complaints 2008/09

The Panel considered the statutory annual report of the Complaints Manager Children's Social Care. The report provided information about the complaints received from children and young people (or their representatives) during the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 and details of key learning points for the Department that had been identified as a result of the complaints.

Over the course of the reported period, the Social Care and Learning Department had received 17 complaints and 29 expressed compliments relating to children's social care services, an improvement on 2007/08 when 29 complaints were received. Of the 17 complaints received in 2008/09:

- 13 were dealt with at Stage 1
- 3 were dealt with at Stage 2
- 1 was made to the Local Government Ombudsman

Of the 17 complaints received 7 Stage 1 complaints were upheld and 2 Stage 1 complaints were partially upheld. All other complaints were not upheld.

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

- When a complaint was received every effort was made to attempt to resolve it at the lowest level possible.
- A complaint could contain a number of concerns, each of which would be investigated fully consequently some parts of the complaint could be upheld while other parts were not. This would result in a complaint receiving a final classification of 'Partially upheld'.
- At the end of every Stage 3 complaint a meeting was held with key officers to discuss any learning points arising as a result of the complaint.
- When dealing with complaints officers worked to statutory deadlines. If there were delays in responding then complainants would be kept fully informed.
- In the case of one Stage 3 complaint that took 64 working days to resolve there would have been significant amounts of communication between the Complainant and the Council in the intervening time period.
- The Complaints Manager would seek guidance from other professionals when assessing a minor's emotional and intellectual capacity to comment about a complaint made on their behalf.
- It was expected that mediation would be the first method used to resolve any complaint received.
- One of the Complaints Manager's key roles was to ensure that the attention of all officers was drawn to key learning points from complaints.
- Compliments received by the Complaints Manager would be passed on to the relevant officers.
- Workshops were being arranged to inform Members of the Children's Social Care complaints process.

9. Adoption Service Inspection Report and Action Plan 2009

The Panel received a report detailing the results of the OFSTED inspection of the Bracknell Forest Adoption Service and the action plan that had been developed in response to the inspection.

The inspection was a planned three yearly inspection and was carried out between 9 and 12 March. This was the second inspection of this highly regulated area and the results had shown an improvement over the first inspection. This inspection had been based around the five outcomes for children set out in the Children's Act 2004 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption; the quality of the management of the team had also been inspected. The Adoption Service had received an overall inspection rating of Satisfactory with individual inspection outcomes being classified as follows:

Outcome	Rating
Helping Children achieve well and enjoy what they do	Outstanding
Helping children make a positive contribution	Outstanding
Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe	Satisfactory
Organisation	Satisfactory
Achieving economic well-being	Not judged
Helping children to be healthy	Not judged

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

- Children with plans for adoption were drawn from amongst the Council's Looked After Children.
- When matching children with potential adopters efforts were made ensure that the culture of the child and the adopter matched however, it was preferred that children were adopted by someone who could meet the child's needs appropriately.
- Administrative staff had received child protection training in the past however this had not be recorded on staff training records and it had not been possible to evidence this to the inspection team. A training programme had now been developed and all training attended was now logged.
- The Family Placement Team was subject to three yearly Criminal Records Bureau checks and these were all up to date.
- The Family Placement Team was a small team that had in the past been affected by long term sickness however the team was now back up to full strength. A new Team Manager had been appointed and had taken up their post on 1 June 2009.
- Action 1.1 Confirm the components of a model, high quality assessment and Action 1.2 Arrange audit of all Family Placement Assessments to inform further training and practice requirements had been included in the Action Plan at the request of the Director of Social Care and Learning. Both actions had been completed.

The Panel thanked officers for all their work and congratulated them on achieving outstanding scores in two inspection categories.

10. **Report of the Departmental Review of Transport Policy**

Chris Taylor, Head of Property and Admissions, gave a presentation on the Education Transport Policy.

The Education Transport Policy was a statutory policy that sets out the Council's arrangements for providing assistance to children and young people to attend school or their place of education. Approximately 950 children in Bracknell Forest benefited from the service. The cost of the service in 2008/09 was £1.8million.

Transport assistance was provided to all pupils of compulsory school age who were in full time education at mainstream schools in the following circumstances:

- Pupils aged under eight who attend the nearest qualifying school, i.e. their designated area school, and live more than two miles from school.
- Pupils aged eight and under sixteen and attend the nearest qualifying school, i.e. their designated area school, and live more than three miles from school.
- Children from low income families, i.e. those families where there was an entitlement to receive free school meals or who were in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit, and who lived more than two miles from their nearest qualifying school.
- Young people over the age of sixteen if they came from a low income family and were in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance. Funding for this cohort was provided through a grant from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

The age guidelines were proscribed by the Education Act and the vast majority of children in Bracknell Forest did not qualify for transport because they lived too close to the school they attended.

There was no automatic entitlement to transport for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Any transport for this cohort had to be requested by the Special Educational Needs Team with each request being dealt with on its own individual merits.

The transport provision was managed by the Council's Integrated Transport Unit and consisted mainly of taxi and minibus provision procured from external suppliers. All transport contracts were reviewed every three years.

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

- Distance was measured from the pupil's home address to the designated school by the nearest available walking route.
- If a child was granted assistance with transport following an Education Transport Appeal hearing then it did not necessarily follow that other children in the same family would receive help. Separate appeals had to be submitted for each child.
- LSC funding was in place for 2009/10. Once the LSC had been wound up, their funding would transfer to the local authority which would then make decisions on how it was utilised.
- The Policy set out the requirements placed on drivers and escorts in terms of training and Criminal Records Bureau checks.
- Work experience placements were not normally covered however any applications received were dealt with on individual merits.
- If transport providers were changed then the changeover period was managed to ensure as little disruption as possible.
- The Panel indicated an interest in Home to School Transport provision from a safeguarding point of view.

The Panel thanked Chris Taylor for his informative presentation.

11. Update on Working Group

The Panel received a report setting out the progress achieved to date by the Working Group of the Panel reviewing 14-19 years education provision in Bracknell Forest.

It was noted that due to the volume of information that the Working Group had accumulated, it was expected that a report would be brought to the Panel for comment in the autumn.

12. Work Programme for the 2009/10 Municipal Year

The Panel considered a report containing the indicative work programme for the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel for 2009/10.

It was noted that the indicative work programme would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for approval on 16 July 2009 prior to its submission to the Corporate Management Team and Executive.

The Panel agreed its indicative work programme for 2009/10, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, for recommendation to the Overview and scrutiny Commission for adoption.

13. **Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report**

The Panel noted a report outlining the activities of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Commission over the past quarter.

14. **Executive Forward Plan**

The panel noted the items on the Executive Forward Plan relating to children's social care and learning.

I015685 Use of Section 106 Funds to Support Grow Our Own Project

The approval date for this decision had been deferred. Clarification would be given on which development schemes the S106 monies that it was proposed to use to support the Grow Our Own project originated from and the conditions placed on the funding.

I016914 Overview and Scrutiny Report: A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and Around Schools in Bracknell Forest

Councillor Mrs Birch's presentation of the report of the Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services at the Executive Briefing had been well received.

It was noted that this had been the first time that a Working Group Lead Member had presented a review report to the Executive. It was considered to be a positive step forward that would help raise the profile of overview and scrutiny and add value to the work that all the Overview and Scrutiny Panels carried out.

CHAIRMAN