

**LIFELONG LEARNING AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL HELD AT THE OAK'S CHILDREN'S CENTRE
26 MARCH 2008
(7.30 - 8.20 pm)**

Present: Councillors Ms Whitbread (Vice-Chairman in the Chair),
Mrs Barnard, Mrs Beadsley, Brossard, Burrows,
Mrs McCracken and Osborne
Mr G Anderson, Church Representative
Mr I Sharland, Parent Governor Representative
Miss V Richardson, Teachers' Association Representative

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Birch, Mrs Ryder and Ms Wilson
Mrs C Draper, Teachers' Association Representative
Mr T Wheaton, Teachers' Association Representative

Also Present: Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children's Services
Councillor Kendall, Executive Member for Education & Libraries
Tony Eccleston, Director of Education, Children's Services & Libraries
Martin Gocke, Assistant Director, Access & Inclusion
Alison Fletcher, Assistant Director, Learning, Achievement & Libraries
David Watkins, Assistant Director, Performance & Resources
Bob Welch, Chief Advisor, Learning, Achievement & Libraries
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny)
Sue Hills, Democratic Services Officer

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Sandra Woodward, Centre Manager, for hosting the meeting and for a very interesting tour of the Centre.

38. Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following Substitute Member:

Councillor Brossard for Councillor Mrs Ryder

39. Minutes and Matters Arising

Attached to the minutes was a note of boys' attainment statistics requested at the last meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 19 December 2007 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

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

41. **Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items.

42. **Departmental Overview and Performance**

The Director introduced the Performance Monitoring Report for the third quarter of 2007/08. The Service Plan contained 67 detailed actions to be completed in support of the 12 Corporate Themes. 60 actions were anticipated to be achieved or had already been achieved and the Panel noted the seven actions causing some concern:-

1. *14 – 19 year old education* - 4 actions of a total of 12 were causing concern. However, progress overall in this area was Amber/Green.
2. *Placement of looked after children* – Performance could be very volatile in this area. Small changes in the cohort had a significant impact on the statistical performance.
3. *Library items issued to individuals confined to their own homes* – there would inevitably be fluctuations within this vulnerable older age group.
4. *Absence from secondary schools* – even though Bracknell Forest's absences were low, they would not meet the target that had been set.

Key areas of work for the spring quarter included:-

5. Preparation for the amalgamation of departments to produce a new Social Care and Learning Department.
6. Establishment of a Children's Trust.
7. Drafting consultation for 14-19 Strategy.
8. Revision of Local Safeguarding Children Board Action Plan.
9. Improving the cost effectiveness of placements of looked after children or those with learning difficulties or disabilities.
10. The opening of the second Children's Centre in Great Hollands – The Oaks.
11. The Fostering Service inspection.

Arising from questions:-

12. *Grow Your Own Project* – The Director undertook to report in more detail in the next Performance Monitoring Report.
13. *Pupil Referral Service* – the Director explained the impact of the vacancy and sickness rates. All statutory responsibilities for excluded pupils were being met but outreach work had been cut back. Recruitment was an on-going issue as the exclusion pattern had changed and now tended to consist of more challenging KS4 pupils.

A review of Learning Support Units within secondary schools would be undertaken in the summer.

43. **School Exclusions**

The Panel noted the progress report on Exclusion from School, introduced by Martin Gocke, Assistant Director.

In Primary Schools only one pupil had been permanently excluded to date, compared to two in 2006/07 and five in 2005/06. To date there had been only 18 fixed period exclusions, compared to 40 in 2006/07 and 57 in 2005/06.

In Secondary Schools there had been a disappointing 19 permanent exclusions to date, but over half of those had been from one school and there had been corresponding reductions in numbers excluded from other schools. Progress in reducing fixed period exclusions was more promising, the number to date being 301 compared to 705 for 2006/07. Not only had the number of exclusions reduced but also the length of time excluded.

Although peer mentoring had been successful in Primary Schools it had not initially in secondary schools. However a new scheme had grown out of the Anti-Bullying work and all six secondary schools were now developing such schemes.

Arising from questions/ discussion:-

1. 80% of permanent exclusions were boys but the 20% girls who were excluded were generally more challenging.
2. Looked after children were carefully monitored.
3. Ethnicity was not an issue in Bracknell Forest.
4. In schools everyone worked together to avoid exclusions as far as possible and the Consistency Management and Co-operative Discipline programme encouraged more positive attitudes amongst the pupils.
5. Managed moves were not on the increase. Their effectiveness depended upon parental support, pupil attitude and staff attitudes at receiving schools.

44. **English as an Additional Language (EAL) Working Group**

The Panel noted Councillor Mrs McCracken's progress report on the work of the Working Group reviewing EAL in the Borough's schools.

The Working Group had held successful and informative meetings with -

- Head Teachers, Teachers and students at Brakenhale School and Garth Hill College;
- EAL specialists; and
- A Language Support Teacher.

The Working Group would be visiting Sandy Lane, Great Hollands and College Town Primary Schools and would report further to the next meeting of the Panel.

45. Extended Services/Children's Centres Working Group

The Panel noted Councillor Mrs McCracken's progress report on the work of the joint Working Group of this Panel and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel reviewing Extended Services and Children's Centres in the Borough.

Initial work on the Children's Centres part of the programme was almost complete although there were some initial concerns about ongoing funding support and that not all the centres had physical buildings.

Meetings in respect of Extended Services had been held in various locations and a meeting had been arranged with Graham Symonds, Extended Services Manager.

It was anticipated that the Working Group's report would be presented to the next meeting of the Panel.

46. Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report

The Panel noted the second quarterly progress report on Overview and Scrutiny activity.

47. Executive Forward Plan

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

The purpose for this listing was to give the Panel an opportunity to indicate if there were any matters forthcoming in the near future which members of the Panel may wish to look at more closely. The Forward Plan was published on the Council's public website which anyone could access.

Arising from questions/ discussion:-

1. The public consultation on 14-19 provision would be sent to all Panel members inviting them to comment.
2. The Director informed the Panel that the school admission arrangements for 2009/10 confirmed co-ordinated admission arrangements and planned admission numbers. Panel members could view the Executive item on-line and make any views known, however it was noted that the decision would be made on 1 April. A copy of the arrangements for 2009/10 would be provided to any Panel member requesting one. The topic would be considered for inclusion in the 2008/09 work programme.
3. In view of the problem of synchronisation of meeting dates and on the suggestion of the Director, the Panel agreed that in future it would like the Director to circulate to Panel members relevant major consultations and then to arrange a briefing session if necessary.

CHAIRMAN