

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 7th December, 2010 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)
Councillor D Neilson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors A Barratt, D Flude, J Goddard, A Kolker, G Merry, M Parsons,
M J Simon, J Wray and McCann

Apologies

Councillors D Beckford, W Livesley and A Ranfield

20 OFFICERS PRESENT

Mark Grimshaw	Scrutiny Officer
Fintan Bradley	Improvement & Achievement Services Manager
Cath Knowles	Head of Safeguarding and Specialist Services
Mark Bayley	Quality Assurance Manager
Ruth Jenkins	Redesign Programme Manager

21 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2010 be approved as a correct record.

22 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Councillor M Simon declared a personal interest on the grounds that she was a Governor at Shavington High School.

23 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to address the Committee.

24 GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER ON EDUCATION BRIEFING

Fintan Bradley attended to provide a presentation on the Government White Paper on Education. In providing an overview to the Paper, it was made clear that what was available at the current time were mainly policy headlines, as the background and detail to these had not yet been made available.

With this in mind, the main issues relating to the White Paper were outlined as follows:

- Enhance prestige and status of teaching profession
- Safe, secure and orderly learning environment
- Reform curriculum and qualifications
- Greater autonomy for schools and school leaders
- Engage new providers and improve parental choice
- Sector led school improvement
- Reform accountability systems – new role for OFSTED
- Reform funding system

Fintan Bradley continued to report on and add what detail was available to a number of these key priorities in the White Paper, touching on issues that had particular relevance to Cheshire East. For instance, in relation to 'sector led school improvement', it was explained that the Government expected well performing schools to support other schools in the area. Attention was drawn to the fact that work of this nature already occurred in Cheshire East with Tytherington High School providing assistance to Macclesfield High School. It was reported that this policy would continue to be implemented, as and when appropriate.

With regards to reforming the funding system two issues were touched upon. Firstly, it was reported that more categories of children would be covered by the 'pupil premium' program and that this would have consequences. It was explained that it was difficult to know what these could be at the current time. Secondly, the schools funding formula was to be simplified and made more transparent.

In terms of improving the quality of teaching, it was reported that among a number of initiatives, the role of schools as teacher training institutions would become more pronounced. Attention was drawn to the fact that two schools in Cheshire East (Fallibroome High School and Holmes Chapel School) were already operating as teacher training schools and would continue to do so.

With concern to improving behaviour in order to have a 'Safe, Secure and Orderly Learning Environment', it was reported that teachers would have increased powers and authority. It was explained that there was little detail to how this would be practically implemented but it was expected that teachers would be able to sanction behaviour "beyond the school gate", having potential consequences for school buses etc. Furthermore, it was noted that the Government would pilot a new approach for permanently excluded pupils, following other examples in which the school excluding the pupil had to find an appropriate alternative rather than the local authority.

It was explained that the curriculum, assessments and qualifications would possibly look very different in the future. Schools could be measured against how many students achieve an English Baccalaureate – a core number of subjects including English, Maths, Science, a Modern or Ancient Language and either Geography or History. Mark Bayley explained that last year's performance data had been measured against the new proposed performance thresholds and that following this Cheshire East would have six schools below the floor target rather than four. It was also reported that the number of pupils achieving the Baccalaureate in their respective schools ranged from 34% to 1.3%. Attention was drawn to the fact that there were over 100 potential courses for pupils to take and therefore it was unlikely that they would currently take the combination required for the Baccalaureate.

Fintan Bradley moved on to outline the consequences to local authorities and their role in providing education. It was explained that in a more autonomous schools system, local authorities have a crucial role to play by:

- Acting as a champion for parents and families
- Supporting vulnerable children
- Acting as a champion for educational excellence

Within this, it was reported that accountability of schools would undergo change and that this was a very important aspect of the paper. It was noted that Governors will have enhanced powers to hold schools to account and that there would be a possible role for Scrutiny.

With the opening question, John McCann queried whether the hard to place protocol, with regards to excluded pupils, would still be in place. It was reported that as it is part of the National Admissions Process it would continue to operate. It was also confirmed that Academies would have to work to this protocol.

With regards to the section of the White Paper which suggested that Academies should reflect the local community, it was queried what this actually meant. It was answered that whilst detail was lacking, it was expected that an Academy should be appropriate for the area. The example of an Academy in Dartmouth was provided which has strong links to the Naval College.

In light of the lack of current detail available to substantiate the policy headlines, the Chairman suggested that particular items should be brought back to the Committee when the background became available.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the presentation be noted
- b) That items be brought back to Committee as the relevant detail becomes available.

25 SCHOOLS INSPECTION UPDATE

Mark Bayley attended to provide a report which captured the performance of Cheshire East Schools in relation to Ofsted Inspection judgements/outcomes as well as summarising the interventions which were in place within Cheshire East's schools.

In opening, it was reported that the service published a spreadsheet which outlined all of the available Ofsted Inspection data on Cheshire East's schools. It was explained that whilst this was already in the public domain it would be useful if a hard copy could be distributed to Committee Members for information and review. It was also outlined that it was difficult for the service to make accurate comparisons of data from each Ofsted Inspection framework to the next. This was due to the parameters of measurement often changing and Members were asked to bear this mind when reviewing information.

Mark Bayley continued to outline the main headline issues from the report. Attention was drawn to paragraph 1.3 in which it was described how the commissioning of support from external Ofsted Inspectors to work with targeted schools had been introduced this year. It was reported that this had been a very successful initiative and had proved excellent value for money.

Further to this, it was reported that the recent Government White Paper had suggested that the frequency of inspections would be reduced for some schools. As had been previously explained, Cheshire East had been very successful in working alongside schools to improve performance. There were concerns therefore regarding how the Council could maintain the momentum of improvement if the ability to offer a wide range of interventions was reduced due to budgetary pressures. It was suggested that Members could get extra training on the inspection regime and intervention options and form a sub-group to gain a better understanding of the relevant issues in a changing policy landscape. It was noted that this issue would be discussed at the next mid-point meeting.

A breakdown summary of the recent Ofsted Inspections was provided. It was explained why the figure for Primary schools achieving 'good' or 'outstanding' appeared lower than expected (54%). Principally, this issue related to the fact that Ofsted targeted schools in terms of those where the data or previous inspection suggested 'lower performance'. Consequently, there had been a reduction in the number of inspections taking place in 'higher achieving' schools therefore skewing the results.

Attention was drawn to the fact that Ofsted Inspections were only ever a snapshot of school performance and that they should always be followed up by the Council's own inspection work.

As a final point, the issue around diversity of interventions was highlighted. It was explained that with such a wide range of interventions, it can be difficult for a strategic management team to understand all of the work and its subsequent outcomes. As a result, Cheshire East had produced a document (example provided as Appendix B in the report) to bring all of the intervention data together to help schools look strategically at issues and to monitor spending and impact.

A query was highlighted by Councillor Westwood who wanted the apparent discrepancy between the number of schools involved in the 'Improving Outcomes Programme', outlined in table two of Appendix A in the report, and the number of schools categorised as 'Intensive' in table three explained. It was reported that at the beginning of the academic year, schools were allocated a category and this had close links with subsequent interventions. In between inspections, schools are able to move between targeted and intensive interventions when deemed necessary, without always changing their original label.

Jill Kelly questioned that with the SIP (School Improvement Plan) funding coming to an end in 2011, what would be Cheshire East's role in supporting struggling schools. It was reported that the SIP had been replaced by a 'Professional Lead' initiative which would still be provided by Cheshire East to some schools and a wider SIP style process was currently being costed.

Councillor Simon commented that most of the schools outlined in table two were in the Crewe and Nantwich area. It was queried why this was so and whether any steps had been taken to make improvements in a collective way. It was confirmed that there was recognition that a 'holistic' or community approach to educational

attainment was desirable. It was suggested that the 'Crewe Vision' was something that should be filtered down to schools and that LAPs should have a role in this.

In providing a final comment, Councillor Gaddum suggested that school governors needed to be asking tough questions in struggling schools. The Committee also wished their congratulations to the service be noted for its excellent performance.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the spreadsheet outlining all of the available Ofsted Inspection data on Cheshire East's schools be made available to Members.
- c) That the Crewe LAP works to cascade the 'Crewe Vision' to relevant schools and stakeholders.
- d) That the possibility of forming a sub group of Members who would receive extra training to improve understanding of the inspection and intervention options around education support be discussed at the subsequent mid-point meeting.

26 ACTION PLAN FROM UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION UPDATE

Following a request from the meeting held on 19 October 2010, Cath Knowles attended to provide an update on the progress made in relation to the action plan drawn up following the Unannounced Inspection of Cheshire East Council's Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements for Children and Families Service by Ofsted.

Attention was drawn to action plan provided as an appendix to the report and Cath Knowles proceeded to highlight some of the main headlines from this. It was suggested that the Committee would appreciate seeing the caseload figures behind this report.

It was queried why most of the items had audits as an 'action' to be undertaken and whether the Committee would get to see the outcomes of these. It was confirmed that when the audits had been completed, the results would be fed back to the Committee at relevant junctures.

A comment was made regarding the fact that 'units' would now manage cases rather than individual social workers. It was questioned whether this would result in a lack of continuity for the children and young people affected. The Committee were reassured that by managing cases in units, it improves continuity, especially when an individual social worker is off sick for instance. Furthermore, it was explained that units help foster reflective and evidence based practice.

With regards to the Council's ICT system (item 6), assurances were sought that funding would be available if a new system was deemed necessary. It was reported that whilst money was available for a new system, the service was still

waiting on the outcomes of the Eileen Munro report. The rationale behind this was to make sure that Cheshire East was in an informed position before making a decision and to possibly align any new system with the findings of the report.

As an aside, Councillor Westwood suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to look at Children's Social Services systems in more detail and that a possible Task and Finish Group would be the best way to go about this. It was proposed that Cath Knowles come back to the subsequent mid-point meeting to suggest which area would be most germane to investigate, bearing in mind that any new Task and Finish Group would be scheduled to start in June, post election.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Committee note the report
- b) That the caseload figures behind the report be made available to Members
- c) That completed audits be brought back to the Committee for review.
- d) That a potential Task and Finish Group into Children's Social Services systems be considered by officers and a response brought back at the next mid-point meeting.

27 REVIEW OF FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

The Committee received the final report of the Task and Finish Group who conducted a Scrutiny Review of Family Support Services. Councillor Westwood, as Chairman of the group explained the main thrust behind the recommendations.

It was reported how it was important that Family Support became a 'brand', something behind which a number of authorities, services and stakeholders can get behind and support. It was also explained that if services did become more 'joined up', as suggested in the recommendations, it would be much easier to continuously monitor and evaluate the success of the programme.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that in a difficult economic climate, the key to getting the very best out of all available resources was to be systematic and organised. It was hoped that the recommendations of the report outlined a way forward for achieving this.

Councillor Gaddum wished to acknowledge the work of the group in producing an excellent and comprehensive report. Thanks were also extended to Ruth Jenkins for her support and expertise in producing the report.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be welcomed and supported.

- b) That the recommendations of the Group be endorsed, and referred to the Cabinet for consideration and necessary action, and that the Cabinet be invited initially to comment on the details of the recommendations.

28 MACCLESFIELD HIGH SCHOOL FORMAL CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the Formal Public Consultation document for the proposed closure of Macclesfield High School upon the establishment of an Academy.

Members were invited to pass comment on the quality of the consultation process and document rather than comment directly on the outcome of the consultation.

Councillor Flude wished to note her appreciation to the Cabinet Member for fully briefing the Labour Group on the proposed option.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Committee fully endorse Cheshire East Council's consultation arrangements on the proposed closure of Macclesfield High School and the establishment of an Academy on the same site and in doing so congratulate the Council on the clarity of the consultation document.

29 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered the items in the 2009/2010 Work Programme and the setting up of a Task and Finish Group reviewing Fostering Services.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Work Programme be received and noted
- b) That the Task and Finish Group reviewing Fostering Services be ratified with the following Membership confirmed:
 - Councillor David Neilson
 - Councillor Dorothy Flude
 - Councillor Gillian Merry
 - Councillor Tony Ranfield
 - Councillor Andrew Kolker
 - Councillor Bill Livesley

30 FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS

The Committee gave consideration to the extracts of the forward plan which fell within the remit of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the forward plan be noted.

31 CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET

There were no consultations from Cabinet.

The meeting commenced at 10.35 am and concluded at 12.30 pm

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)