

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 18th October, 2011 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)
Councillor K Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors L Brown, S Gardiner, P Hoyland, D Neilson, G Merry, B Silvester,
McCann and B Burkhill

Apologies

Councillors W Livesley and M Sherratt and H Gaddum.

In Attendance

Councillor Rhoda Bailey

Officers

Fintan Bradley - Head of Strategy, Planning & Performance
Cath Knowles - Head of Safeguarding & Specialist Services
Phil Mellen - Head of the Virtual School
Mark Grimshaw – Scrutiny Officer

97 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2011 be approved as a correct record.

98 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Councillor Neilson declared a personal interest by the virtue that his Grandchildren were part of the Virtual School.

99 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

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

100 FOSTERING AND ADOPTION VIDEO

Members watched a short film which had been produced by the Fostering and Adoption team.

Cath Knowles, Head of Safeguarding & Specialist Services, reported that the film had successfully been premiered at the 'Reel Cinema' in Crewe and as a result of

this, they had agreed to show a condensed version of the film before every movie during Children in Need week.

It was queried whether it would be possible for a similar exercise to be carried out at Cinemac in Macclesfield and whether it would be worthwhile contacting other media outlets such as the BBC, BBC North West and ITV to see if the film could be distributed more widely. It was suggested that these comments along with the Committee's congratulations and praise be fed back to Stephen Kelly, Recruitment Officer - Fostering & Adoption.

It was also questioned whether the service had the appropriate resources to cope with the extra demand that such a campaign might produce. Cath Knowles reassured the Committee that following the recent restructure there were now dedicated teams to assist with the recruitment process and that any increase in interest would be coped with.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Fostering and Adoption team be congratulated for their work in producing the film.
- b) That it be suggested to Stephen Kelly that he contacts other media outlets such as Cinemac, the BBC, BBC North West and ITV to see if the film could be distributed more widely.

101 **VIRTUAL HEAD**

Phil Mellen, Headteacher at the Virtual School attended to provide an overview of the work that his team performs and to provide an update on the results they have achieved so far.

He explained that since coming into existence on 1 September 2010, the Virtual School had continued to enable Cheshire East to take an overview of all its Cared for Children and their educational progress. One of the ways of doing this was to work closely with schools and in particular designated teachers. Phil Mellen reported that this assisted in information sharing and for channelling funding in the most appropriate and efficient manner.

Phil Mellen continued to assert that whilst the Virtual School did a lot of work to improve the educational attainment of Cared for Children; a child's chance of doing well was heavily dependent on the stability of their placement. It was noted therefore, that it was necessary for the Virtual School to work to keep a child in the same school, minimising placement volatility. As a result, Phil Mellen reported that he sat on the fostering and adoption panel to provide an educational point of view to decisions around placement moves.

Referring to an additional sheet which provided a comparison on the educational attainment of Cared for Children in 2010 and 2011, Phil Mellen explained that whilst they obviously looked for improvement year on year, the data was volatile in nature as the cohort numbers were relatively small. As a result, the more telling figures would be a trend of improvement over several years.

As a final point, Phil Mellen outlined a number of priority actions for 2011-12. These were as follows:

- Early years
- Key Stage 1
- 14-19
- Improving the Personal Education Plan (PEP) format
- Well-being
- Establishing an Advisory Board.

A number of questions were asked around the performance figures for educational attainment. It was stated that a big improvement in Key Stage 4 results was required. Phil Mellen agreed but asserted that the trend from precedent authorities was for incremental change rather than for rapid progress. He continued to state that he expected the early intervention work to have a large effect on results over the next five years and that the success of the Virtual School as a concept would have to be judged then.

It was also queried whether the service was worried about the drop in Key Stage 2 results from 2010. Phil Mellen confirmed that whilst this was far from ideal the figure that the service was really concerned about was whether children were making a two level progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 as this was a more accurate indicator of the work of the Virtual School. Attention was drawn to the fact that this had improved since 2010.

It was queried whether the Virtual School provided support for children or young people who were staying with relatives and/or not on a full care order. Phil Mellen explained that it was difficult to identify these children and young people as they were not included on the PARIS system. Having said this, he confirmed that if the Virtual School became aware of such a situation, support would be offered.

Attention was drawn to the aforementioned priority action around the 14-19 age group. It was queried whether there was a mechanism for measuring outcomes such as being in full time education, training or employment. Phil Mellen reported that the Virtual School was working closely with the post-16 team and that an appointment was imminent for someone to track outcomes more closely. In addition, he explained that the Virtual School was building relationships with nearby universities in an attempt to access the 'wider participation grant' which universities received from central government. Phil Mellen continued to report that the Virtual School was working to get young people in years 7, 8 and 9 to consider university as an option before choosing their subjects for GCSE's.

It was questioned whether the Virtual School had any impact on non-academic areas as well as attempting to improve educational attainment. Phil Mellen reported that the Virtual School, where appropriate, funded activities to do with 'education' in its widest possible sense as it recognised that well-being was vitally important to a young persons life.

It was queried whether the Virtual School was doing anything to help Foster Carers effectively challenge the PEP process. Phil Mellen explained that training was provided for foster carers on the educational system so that they could challenge from an informed position and the Committee was also reassured that foster carers would be part of the Quality Assurance process.

As a final point, a number of comments were made with regards to the presentation of data, particularly exam results, in the report. It was suggested that it would be useful to have the following additional information in future reports:

- The national 'mainstream' educational attainment figures for comparison
- The Cheshire East 'mainstream' educational attainment figures for comparison
- The number of students in each yearly cohort.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted
- b) That the following additional information be provided in future Virtual School reports:
 - a. The national 'mainstream' educational attainment figures for comparison
 - b. The Cheshire East 'mainstream' educational attainment figures for comparison
 - c. The number of students in each yearly cohort.

102 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members considered the work programme. It was suggested that an item regarding what Cheshire East was doing to improve underperforming schools be added to the agenda for the meeting scheduled 15 November 2011. It was also suggested that it was important for the Committee to consider the budget for Children's Directorate and that this needed to be done ideally at the next meeting.

As a final point, Members referred to the glossary which had been provided by Gill Betton, Policy Manager in the Children's Directorate. It was suggested that the Committee's appreciation be noted.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the item regarding what Cheshire East was doing to improve underperforming schools be added to the agenda for the meeting scheduled 15 November 2011.
- b) That the proposed 2012/13 budget be brought to the Committee for consideration at the next scheduled meeting.
- c) That thanks be extended to Gill Betton for drafting the Children's Directorate glossary.

103 **FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS**

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

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

104 **CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET**

There were no consultations from Cabinet.

105 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

106 **LOCAL CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING BOARD REVIEW**

Cath Knowles, Head of Safeguarding & Specialist Services, attended to provide the background detail on the process and outcomes of a recent Serious Case Review.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That Cath Knowles feed the Committee's comments to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 4.20 pm

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)