

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 28 June 2012

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Andrew Sangar (Deputy Chair), Jayne Dunn, Rob Frost, George Lindars-Hammond, Keith Hill, Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Lynn Rooney, Colin Ross, Nikki Sharpe and Stuart Wattam.

Education Non-Council Members:

Jules Jones, Joan Stratford, Gillian Foster and Alison Warner

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mohammad Maroof, and no substitute Member was appointed.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

- 2.1 There were no items where the public and press were excluded.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest from Members upon agenda items.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

- 4.1 Louise Blake, the parent of a pupil at Meadowhead School, referred to a petition containing 106 signatures regarding zero-fare travel passes for children from the Bradway area to Meadowhead School which she had presented to the Committee originally in February 2012. She reiterated the inconsistencies that existed in the current arrangements and asked Members to consider the case for all children in the area to be considered on equal and fair grounds. She commented that she had not as yet received a full response from the Committee with regard to the representation she had made back in February regarding safe routes to school (in particular, Greenhill Parkway), and she wished to know whether any progress had been made on the findings of any such investigation.
- 4.2 **RESOLVED:** The Policy Officer (Scrutiny) and the Chair to liaise with officers from Children, Young People and Families Service to provide Ms. Blake with a full response, and involve the following bodies, as appropriate :- Cabinet Highways Committee and Admissions Committee.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- 5.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 16th May 2012 and on 26th April 2012 were approved as correct records, subject to the inclusion of a further bullet

point in section 6.8 of the minutes of 26th April, as follows:-

- Members' expressed concerns around increased school autonomy and the importance this placed on the role of School Governors.

6. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES PRIORITIES 2012-13

6.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, Dr. Sonia Sharp, reported upon priorities for the CYPF Portfolio over the coming year. She reported that there would be a greater emphasis upon improving the quality of learning and skills, enabling safe, healthy and strong families and ensuring that children and young people were active and engaged.

6.2 She reported upon nationally recognised initiatives such as Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate (ESCAL), and stated that attendance in schools was improving, with persistent absenteeism reducing. She stated that Sheffield City Council's Children's Services were seen as 'good and improving', and that some services, such as the Fostering and Adoption Service, had been rated by Ofsted as being 'good with outstanding features', which meant the Service had made a dramatic improvement over recent years.

6.3 Dr. Sharp went on to report that more children and young people were successfully engaging with education, employment and training and that the number of children not in education, employment or training (NEET) was at an historic low, despite the economic downturn.

6.4 She spoke about the challenges currently facing the City Council, which included the reorganisation of the NHS around GP practices, with a greater role for local government in public health, and in turn, children's health. These changes had to be delivered within the context of national reform; in a way in which changes to service delivery were seamless for clients.

6.5 Members' comments and questions were answered as follows:-

- 6.6
- Dr. Sharp acknowledged that there was still a great deal of work to be done to bring secondary school standards up to where they should be.
 - There had been extremely effective results from the 'Lead Headteachers' programme.
 - There were problems with schools 'unofficially' excluding children, where pupils were being 'asked to stay at home' which was hindering progress being made.
 - There had been significant improvements in educational standards achieved by Looked After Children, although there was more to do in terms of ensuring these trends remained positive.
 - Members were unanimous in their view that the Multi-Agency Support Teams had been an excellent innovation; catching problems early and helping to work with families at a preventative stage rather than problems being referred to Social Services (Sheffield now had the second lowest number of children in care in the UK).

- The 'bar was to be raised' with regard to Ofsted reports, and Sheffield must respond to this change.
- There were still problems with parents feeling that sports and social activities were too expensive for their children to attend.
- There was still a significant gap to close in terms of the results from children from BME backgrounds, children with learning difficulties and children who received Free School Meals, as all these groups were underperforming at present. There were particular concerns around the educational performance of Somali boys.
- It was essential to ensure that CYP issues such as breastfeeding remained a priority under the new Clinical Commissioning Group structure.
- There was a potential impact of the proposed welfare reforms on families already struggling, and reports from various charities had shown a recent increase in the uptake of food parcels.
- Pressure was being applied from Central Government for Sheffield to reduce the length of time taken for an adoptive family to be found for children, but Dr. Sharp was adamant that this should not compromise the existing systems, which had only seen one adoptive family breakdown in the last 2 years.
- There was still a great deal of work taking place around Early Years work, especially with regard to consistencies in standards of child minding services. It was essential to get things right at this stage, otherwise time in primary schools would be spent playing 'catch up'.
- The importance of successfully continuing to get statistics and information from Academies was emphasised, in order for the City Wide Learning Body to function effectively.
- Members expressed concerns over the number of days lost through exclusion, and Dr. Sharp reported that many schools now chose to 'segregate' children from their classmates instead of sending them home for excluded periods, so that the pupils could continue to attend and learn.
- Concerns were raised around some Headteachers being replaced with 'in-house' arrangements if they left, and Members were clear that any such posts should be advertised nationally in order to secure the very best candidate.
- Although the importance of affordable family holidays was acknowledged, some Members expressed concerns around parents taking their children out of school for holidays to avoid the high cost of summer holiday flights and accommodation. Some Members felt that taking authorised leave in this manner was insulting to the school.
- It was noted that some secondary schools had begun to focus on individual pupil tracking of performance and were moving towards personalised target setting.
- There was a continued drive towards excellent standards of teaching in secondary schools, as it was felt that 'mediocrity' had been acceptable for too long.
- Dr. Sharp was keen that the Academies agenda focused on 'increased accountability' rather than 'increased autonomy'. Members stressed the

need for complete openness and transparency under the new Academies arrangements, although it was clear that they could not be forced to provide this information against their will. Dr. Sharp added that the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families had a statutory role to ask such questions about schools' performance.

- Some Members felt that the six week holidays were too long and that children's education suffered as a result of this extended break.

6.7 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee;

(a) congratulates Dr. Sharp for the successes achieved during her term as Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families and wishes her the best of luck in her new role, and

(b) requests that the Assistant Director, Policy and Performance, provides figures as to where Sheffield sits nationally with regard to school attendance by Looked After Children.

7. **POLICY UPDATE**

7.1 The Policy Officer (Scrutiny) provided a detailed update upon some key developments in Education Policy, for Members' information, including:-

- £500,000 scholarship scheme launched for Special Educational Needs support staff
- Reform of alternative provision – consultation
- The future role of local authorities in school improvement
- Schools causing concern
- Improving attendance at school
- Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Guidance on Exclusions from maintained schools, academies and Pupil Referral Units in England
- DfE – Statutory Guidance for schools and local authorities on careers guidance and consultation on extending the age range
- SOLACE Filling the Gap: the Championing Role of English Councils in Education

7.2 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee notes the contents of the report now submitted.

8. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

8.1 Following the presentation by the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families and the subsequent discussion, suggestions for the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2012/13 were as follows:-