



Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 23 July 2014

Attendance

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss (Chair)
Cllr Mark Evans (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Christopher Haynes
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Daniel Warren

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| Cyril Randles | Church of England – Diocese of Lichfield |
| Kasmie Hawker | Wolverhampton Youth Council |
| Tanya Kasinganeti | Wolverhampton Youth Council |

Employees

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| Earl Piggott-Smith | Scrutiny Officer |
| James McElligott | Assistant Director, Learning and Achievement |

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from the following Councillors

Cllr Michael Heap
Cllr Lorna McGregor
Cllr Mark Evans
Cllr Jas Dehar

- 2 **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre declared a non-discloseable pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 (Draft Wolverhampton School Improvement Strategy) in so far as they relate to Governor of the City of Wolverhampton College and Director of the Central Learning Partnership Board.

- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (26.3.14)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26.3.14 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

Cllr Hodgkiss briefed the panel on the process for adding items to the scrutiny work programme and encouraged the panel to suggest topics for consideration.

Cllr Brookfield queried how members of the panel will be kept updated on national policy developments which fall within its remit. Cllr Brookfield also commented on the child safeguarding issues linked to the issue of female genital mutilation and forced marriage, as areas which the panel should consider. The panel discussed how the information about national policy developments should be presented.

Cllr O'Neill commented on the need to consider the limited employee resources available to support the work of the panel and that it was important that a flexible approach is adopted when deciding which items to include in the work programme.

Cllr Wainwright suggested that the children's homes should be considered as a future item for the panel. Cllr Wainwright commented that this would likely to be longer term review.

The panel discussed adding the issue of looked after children to the programme. The panel agreed that there should be a discussion with other committees who are leading on this area to avoid duplication.

Resolved

1. Jim McElligott agreed to present regular briefing notes on changes to national regulations or new policy initiatives to the Panel as appropriate.
2. The following topics to be added to the draft panel work programme:
 - Children homes
 - Looked after Children

5 **Draft Wolverhampton School Improvement Strategy**

Jim McElligott gave an overview of the report. He discussed the main elements of the refreshed strategy, including the role of the Council in providing appropriate challenge to schools and explained the powers of the Council to take action where children were not receiving a good education. He also highlighted the responsibilities of the Council in supporting schools to deliver a good education and meet their responsibilities as detailed in the legislation.

Jim McElligott explained that the strategy is currently out for consultation and a final draft will be presented to Cabinet in the autumn. He commented that the level of support given to individual schools is based on the needs of the school and other intelligence, for example OFSTED reports.

Cllr O'Neill welcomed the report and commented that it was an excellent document.

Cllr O'Neill commented on the mechanisms for the Council to quality check services delivered to schools by non-local authority organisations. Jim McElligott explained that schools have the discretion to buy in services and advice from external providers. The role of the Council is to remind the schools of their responsibilities and to reassure themselves that they are meeting their statutory responsibilities when contracting with non-Council organisations to deliver services.

Cllr O'Neill referred to a previous panel discussion about how funding from pupil premium was being used by schools and also exemplars of good practice in other schools in how the money was being used to improve the education of children and young people. Jim McElligott commented that it would be possible to collate information about exemplars of effective practice and share this information with the panel.

Cllr O'Neil commented on the quality of training and support given to school governors and how the Council deals with schools that choose not to positively respond to offers of help.

Jim McElligott commented that Council visits every school at least once a year. During such the visits advisors will review school self-evaluation forms, in addition to other data and intelligence to help provide a picture about the effectiveness of the governing body in meeting their responsibilities.

Cyril Randles queried whether the panel could receive details of number of schools in each of assessment categories and also how the Council would know if the strategy was making a difference.

Jim McElligott commented that information on the number of schools in each of the assessment categories is in the public domain and could be shared with the panel during the year to provide an opportunity to see changes. He explained that the number of schools in each category will clearly be affected by the timings of OFSTED inspections.

Jim McElligott explained that there are 30 schools in Wolverhampton which have been assessed as being a risk and the work being done to help them improve. He explained that four schools previously rated as requiring improvement have made improvements as a result of intervention of the Council and are expected to show improved ratings when the information is published.

Cyril Randles queried where powers reside within the Council to take action where there are concerns about the performance of a school. Jim McElligott that power to take action is with the council through the Director of Children's Services under the 2006 Education and Inspections Act. The powers are delegated to employees within the Council.

Cyril Randles queried the relationship between the Council and academies. Jim McElligott explained that the Council has a very good working relationship with local

academies. The Council has been invited by a number of academies to support their school improvement approach including senior leaders.

Cllr Hardacre suggested while welcoming the strategy would like to see a stronger focus at the beginning of the document about safeguarding.

Jim McElligott supported the suggestion and agreed to make the change to the draft document.

Cllr Hardacre commented on whether there was sufficient capacity within the Council to deliver the strategy, in view of the changes in the education service. Cllr Hardacre also commented on the available employee resources available to take early appropriate action where concerns have been raised about a school.

Jim McElligott commented that the role of the local authority is in identifying schools where help is needed, determining what help is needed and deciding the best way of meeting the need and provide a quality assurance check. He commented on the budgetary pressures facing the Council and how the service has been reorganised to provide the most effective service. Jim McElligott commented key areas had been strengthened to support the improvements in schools and in some situations this has meant bringing in consultants with the necessary experience and knowledge. This approach has allowed the service to better understand the issues facing schools.

Cllr Waite queried that given the current assessment by OFSTED on the position of schools in the city, how long it would be before improvements would be seen. Jim McElligott commented that Wolverhampton had been rated as 151st out of 152 local education authorities nationally last year. Wolverhampton is still in the bottom third, but it making progress. Jim McElligott explained that the depending on when OFSTED inspect local schools then this could move the Council up the ratings. He commented on the work done at Key Stage 1 and 2 and the significant progress made with some schools.

The improvement in school performance in these schools could be directly linked to interventions by the Council .This progress is a practical example of the areas highlighted in the strategy document.

Cllr O'Neill commented on the role of the Council in checking the quality of the governor training and support provided by external organisations to local schools. Jim McElligott commented that schools are expected to carry out their legal responsibilities and the Council will be challenging them. The Council is working with schools to improve the situation.

Jim McElligott expressed concerns about the recruitment of school governors and effectiveness in challenging poor school performance. He commented on the work being done to identify schools at risk and devising specific strategies to support them, in particularly to offer more challenge to head teachers.

Jim McElligott commented on the timeline for publishing school exam results and suggested that January would the right time to look at them

Tanya Kasinganeti queried the involvement of young people in helping to improve school performance. Jim McElligott commented on the work done with school councils.

The OFSTED inspection process focuses much more than the Council in finding out what young people think and would also involve analysing parental complaints and considering the views of the wider community about the school.

Resolved:

1. The panel welcomed the report and the plans for improving school performance.
2. The panel recommended that the issue of safeguarding is detailed in the first page of the draft strategy.

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Learning and Achievement Structure Chart

Jim McElligott presented the structure chart of the service area for information.