



CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on JULY 10 2006 at 7:00PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT:

Councillor John Friary – Chair
Councillor Nick Vineall – Vice-Chair
Councillor Adele Morris
Councillor Sandra Rhule
Councillor Bob Skelly
Councillor Veronica Ward
Josie Spanswick

OFFICERS:

Romi Bowen – Strategic director of children's services
Shelley Burke – Head of overview and scrutiny
Alison Delyth – Strategic director of education
Stephen Gaskell – Head of corporate planning and performance
Carina Kane – Scrutiny project manager
Donna Kinnair – Director of clinical leadership and head of children's integrated commissioning
Ian Millichap – Constitutional manager
Margaret Sutherland – Head of children's social care services
Rachel Woolf – Senior education lawyer

Councillor Fiona Colley – Chair of the overview and scrutiny committee

Members and officers from the Housing Scrutiny were present for Item 1.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the Ven Dr Michael Ipgrave.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS AS URGENT

None.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

None.

- 1. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORTS AND FORWARD PLANS [pages 1 - 60]**
- 1.1 The Chair explained that this was a joint session with housing scrutiny which would outline how performance reports and the forward plan were tools used within the council. The head of corporate planning and performance then gave a presentation about the role of the performance reporting and the quarterly performance reports. The constitutional manager followed with a presentation about the forward plan and key decisions taken by the council.
- 1.2 Members were invited to comment on the presentations. Points on the performance reports included:
- performance reports comment on trends, however caution was needed when comparing performance over time, as there are often changes to the performance criteria
 - black and white copies of the performance reports did not clearly show the amber/red/green indicators to signal the levels of performance against the set indicators
 - The 3-year target setting was reviewed annually - thus while the 2006/07 targets were agreed, the two subsequent years remained open to negotiation
 - the report format was not particularly user-friendly, either for members of the public or elected councillors. Although there have been improvements over time, more development was needed.
- 1.3 Sub-committee discussion about the forward plan presentation included:
- whether controversial decisions were included on the forward plan. The constitutional manager said officers judged whether a decision was a key decision and therefore should be on the forward plan. The constitution included guidance on this process, although the guidance is limited with regards to how such decisions are reached internally. Members suggested that this was an issue the constitutional manager could review
 - whether the ‘consultation’ column of the forward plan gave sufficient details about the groups and individuals who had been consulted
 - a suggestion that forthcoming important decisions coming up for executive consideration could be communicated to the public via Southwark Life or other council publications.
- 1.4 At 7.45pm the meeting adjourned and housing scrutiny members left the meeting. The meeting reconvened at 7.55pm, with introductions from members and officers present.
- 1.6 Members then asked questions prompted by commentary in the performance report:
- 1.7 Members sought assurance that the council’s consultation process for academy schools was not open to challenge, like a recent case in Merton. Officers believed Southwark’s consultation met the statutory requirements, and explained that the case in Merton was more controversial because the academy involved the amalgamation of two schools. The Vice-Chair said the Waverley academy consultation was unique because there had been a lot of publicity, particularly because of the Eden campaign.

- 1.8 Members commented on the disappointing school results for looked after children. Officers said there were strategies across the board to improve this. Performance was improving. The Chair directed members to an ID&eA report: *Show me how I matter: a guide to the education of looked after children*.
- 1.9 Performance with regard to tracking pupil mobility was also discussed. Officers agreed this was concerning and said work was planned to address this. In some case up to 60 percent of children who left secondary school did not start at that school in year seven and the outcome for these pupils was not as good. Regeneration schemes could be a factor in levels of pupil mobility. School profiling tracked annual changes. Members discussed factors that may contribute to pupil mobility; reasons mentioned included access to affordable housing, relocation near to a school of choice, cultural considerations and the transience of new arrivals.
- 1.10 Officers were asked to explain what the healthy schools team did. They said that initially a Lambeth/Southwark/Lewisham partnership had been set up. As the healthy schools initiative had taken off, Southwark had withdrawn from the partnership and employed a dedicated officer (who had been originally involved in the partnership).

RESOLVED: 1. That the scrutiny officer circulate the council's Children & Young People's Plan, the ID&eA report *Show me how I matter: a guide to the education of looked after children*, and any other useful education and children's services related background documents to sub-committee members.

2 WORK PROGRAMME 2006/07 [pages 61 - 65]

- 2.1 The strategic directors of education and children's services presented the sub-committee with information about the children's services and education areas in the council including the vision, priorities, what's been achieved to date, and some of the challenges ahead.
- 2.2 The presentation created discussion around:
- teenage pregnancy. Members were told that the hotspots in Southwark were Nunhead and Grange wards, and discussed practical issues around providing advice to students.
 - referrals to specialist child health services. Members discussed what was included in specialist services and why there was a large increase in new referrals (improvement in children's survival rates, better identification and diagnosis, immigration).
- 2.3 Members then turned to the list of scrutiny review suggestions from members and officers. The suggestions are discussed below.

Southwark Schools for the Future

- 2.4 The director of education explained that this policy impacted on all areas of education and aimed to transform the school stock. Members wanted to know what they could influence, and officers suggested the sub-committee could focus on special needs provision and primary schools and be involved in the policy development around schools with one and a half form entry.

Education finance

- 2.5 Officers suggested that the sub-committee look at the dedicated schools grant, the school funding formula and school balances because these were different to other council budgets.
- Performance of local schools
- 2.6 Officers said there was a range of information that the sub-committee could be presented with in terms of school performance. Members thought it important to step back from the statistics and ensure that lessons were being learned. The director of education suggested scrutiny track the two schools in special measures. Members were keen to invite key people from these schools to talk to them about their experiences.
- 2.7 Members decided that the suggestion to review the filling of head teacher vacancies should be included under school performance. Head teacher vacancies had been a serious problem in the past and, as leadership was related to a school's success, it was important to consider to what extent the new strategy was working and if there were ways to improve it further.
- 2.8 The exam results of looked after children was another area the sub-committee decided to bring under school performance. This could include working closely with, and receiving regular reports from, the Corporate Parenting Panel. Members thought there was more to review around looked after children, such as how to assist them to achieve their wider potential, and suggested this could be subject to separate scrutiny.
- Providing more for young people to do
- 2.9 Members decided that this item linked to the suggestion of looking at sport and exercise at school.
- Reducing the incidence of crime against young people
- 2.10 It was agreed that this item was linked to the suggestion to look at bullying and knife culture at school. Southwark News had approached a member offering to promote and assist any work on this. Bullying and knives were a big issue for parents, and members commented that children could both be the victims and the perpetrators. Further discussion included suggestions to hear from the 'Beat Bullying' organisation, school councillors and parents, and to publicise the review in Southwark Life.
- Children's health and well-being at school: food and nutrition
- 2.11 Members decided that this issue was being widely considered already, so there was no need to include it on the current work programme.
- Action research study of children being decanted
- 2.12 The impact of regeneration schemes on children had been raised during earlier discussion about Southwark Schools for the Future. Officers were proposing a research study following a cohort of eight year olds from regeneration areas over four years (and therefore capture their secondary school transfer) in order to look at the effect on their lives. Members were keen for this research to take place.
- Extended schools
- 2.13 The Chair said that there was a report on this due to the September 2005 executive and he was keen to see this on the work programme at the next meeting. There was a member discussion about the impact of extended schools in terms of parental convenience and the child experiences. Members wanted to hear views of parents and teachers as part of the scrutiny.

Early years

- 2.14 A number of community nurseries were either being closed or threatened with closure, and there was considerable material on the issue from previous scrutiny work and best value reviews. Officers explained that a review of community nurseries was being commissioned, and undertook to put this review to the sub-committee.

Executive member interview

- 2.15 Members agreed to interview the executive member for children's services and education both at the October meeting, and again later in the 2006/07 municipal year.
- 2.16 Members noted that most of the items proposed for the work programme were related to education rather than children's services. There was a large number of other possible review work around every child matters, adoption and fostering, child protection, youth provision etc. The head of overview and scrutiny reminded the sub-committee that the interview with the executive member played a monitoring role and could pick up other issues that were not on the work programme. The chair of the overview and scrutiny committee (OSC) added that OSC may review youth engagement and citizenship.
- 2.17 In terms of prioritising reviews on the work programme, the sub-committee decided to look first at Southwark Schools for the Future and extended schools. Bullying and knife culture was to also be included at an early stage in the work programme.
- 2.18 Members noted the ambitious amount of review work, and accepted that this could be a provisional 2-year programme.
- 2.19 Officers advised that as of the next meeting, sub-committee membership would include two parent governors and a rotating head teacher attendance. Members thought it useful to invite head teachers to give a brief report about their school at each meeting, and suggested there could also be a short report from different children's services and education divisions at each meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the scrutiny project manager draft a work programme for the sub-committee's consideration.
2. That the executive member for children's services and education be invited to the October 2006 meeting.
3. That the October 2006 meeting look at the Southwark Schools for the Future and extended schools.
4. That officers provide the sub-committee with information about the average age of teenage pregnancies in Southwark.

The meeting closed at 9:45pm.

CHAIR:

DATE: