CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on OCTOBER 11 2006 at 7:00PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillor John Friary – Chair
Councillor Nick Vineall – Vice-Chair
Councillor Jonathan Mitchell
Councillor Adele Morris
Councillor Sandra Rhule
Councillor Bob Skelly
Councillor Veronica Ward
Ms Ann Marie Eastwood – parent governor representative
Mr Damian Fox – head teacher representative
Mrs Josie Spanswick – Catholic diocese representative

OTHERS PRESENT:

James Brown – head of management information and analysis
Romi Bowen – strategic director of children's services
Shelley Burke – head of overview and scrutiny
Superintendent David Chinchen – Metropolitan Police
Alison Delyth – strategic director of education
Carina Kane – scrutiny project manager
Councillor Caroline Pidgeon – executive member for children's services and education (item 1 only)
Terry Reynolds – deputy director achievement, access and inclusion
Councillor Martin Seaton
Mark Small – education lawyer
Mike Smith – assistant director, community strategy
Rachel Woolf – senior education lawyer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the Ven Dr Michael Ipgrave and Mr Alie Kallon. Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Jonathan Mitchell.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS AS URGENT

None.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the children's services and education scrutiny sub-committee meeting held on 10 July 2006 be agreed as a correct record of proceedings and signed by the Chair, subject to replacing the last phrase of the first bullet point, paragraph 2.2, with "and discussed practical issues around advice to students".

INFORMATION FROM THE HEADTEACHER REPRESENTATIVE

The Chair invited the headteacher representative to tell the committee about his school in order for the committee to build up knowledge of local schools. The headteacher representative informed that he had been the headteacher at the St Thomas the Apostle College, based in Nunhead, for two years. It was a Catholic boys' school for 11 to 16 year olds and had 750 students on the school roll. The majority (85%) were from an ethnic minority and many had English as a second language.

The headteacher also said the school was part of the next wave for Building Schools for the Future, possibly starting in 2008, and he considered the school to be successful. The achievement levels for black boys was well known within the authority and by Ofsted.

1. **EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION** [pages 1 - 3]

1.1 The Chair explained that as there were a large number of questions for the executive member, committee members would be invited to ask one or two questions each. A written response would then be provided for questions not answered at the meeting.

1.2 The first question put to the executive member was an additional question asking for an update about the early closure of the Academy at Peckham and the Harris Girls' Academy on September 22 2006. The executive member invited Superintendent David Chinchen to respond to the question on her behalf.

1.3 The superintendent provided the committee with the background to the incident. He explained how tensions had been increasing between two well-known 'gangs', one based in Deptford, the other in Peckham. There had been a number of incidents and police operations involving Southwark and Lewisham police in the week leading up to the school closures. This included a murder in Deptford on September 17 2006.

1.4 The police had received information that firearms would be used towards the end of the school day on the 22nd - not outside the school gates but in the general area - and also had information that attendance at the Harris Girls' Academy that day was lower than normal. Concerned parents had been ringing the schools, suggesting that the knowledge was wide-spread.

1.5 A number of options were considered to deal with this, including closing the schools early or using different evacuation routes. The superintendent reported that on the balance of risks and the information and experiences during the week, it was considered safer to close both schools early and clear the area. While the police knew when and where the incident was supposed to occur, they did not know who was going to do it or who the target was.

1.6 The superintendent informed the committee about the course of action taken. Communication had been established with the schools, and police officers and community wardens had been deployed to assist with providing information. Armed officers were deployed after 5pm, and had been keeping a low profile around the school earlier in the day. The police maintained communication with the schools over the weekend and while attendance rates were lower than usual on the Monday and Tuesday, they were now back to the usual levels.

1.7 At the time of the meeting, there were still gang tensions. Following a number of police operations, there had been eight arrests in connection with the murder, and ten gang-associated arrests. The superintendent also reported there was no evidence that a shot had been fired in the vicinity of the Academy at Peckham, as had been rumoured.

1.8 The superintendent told the committee that lessons had been learnt as a result of the incident around the following areas:

– contingency plans and an operational protocol with schools
– communication with parents and pupils
– media coverage (which had made it a national focus by linking unrelated incidents).

1.9 Members commented that the media coverage was worrying and wanted to know if there were divisions of gangs in schools. The superintendent said it was not a huge problem, and was no greater than other inner-city boroughs. It only involved a small number of people; a lot of people were on the fringes. The Peckham gang involved teenagers so there were links to schools. In his opinion, the relationship between schools and the borough police was excellent. He explained that beat officers covered most of the secondary schools, and the police were working closely with the Youth Offending Team and parents to improve the links with schools.

1.10 The executive member for children's services and education then responded to questions asked by committee members.

Question 1: *What do you regard as your top three priorities for the coming 12 months? What actions do you plan to take in the next 12 months to ensure those priorities are achieved?*

1.11 The executive member said that it was difficult to narrow down to just three. She listed her top priorities as the capital strategy – Southwark schools for the future, early years review and implementation and safeguarding children. She further mentioned teenage pregnancy, improving attainment and extended schools – linked to a better use of community facilities - as being key priorities.

1.12 She assured the committee that these were areas that she personally was passionate about, not areas that officers had identified as a priority.

Question 3: *What measures are being undertaken to attract high quality candidates for Headship in the borough?*

1.13 The executive member outlined measures being undertaken:

– providing assistance to governing bodies when appointing head teachers
– establishing the Southwark school leaders team to cover headship vacancies and developing existing staff in schools.

- recruitment packages promoting diversity in culture and arts as well as financial incentives
- different headship models – e.g. jobshare.

Question 4: *Could we have an update on the Southwark School Leaders (SSL) team set up to address the shortage of head teachers?*

1.14 The executive member said the SSL have taken over some headship posts in the borough and as a result there had been some real improvements in attainment. HMI visits had reported positively about SSLs, and it was unique to have such a dynamic team. She suggested that the committee may wish to meet the SSL.

1.15 The headteacher representative remarked that there had been a rocky start, but the SSL was doing well.

1.16 Members commented on continuous professional development and increased costs to schools for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Officers explained that in the past the council had subsidised costs for NQTs, but had now asked schools to start paying. It was important for governing bodies to realise that they had to invest in the development of their school leaders if they wanted to recruit and keep staff.

Question 5: *Are you happy with the way the Admissions system is working as there still seems to be significant dissatisfaction?*

1.17 The executive member said that the admissions system was working better than before. There had been a few complaints, but this was from parents whose children did not get into a school of their choice.

1.18 She added that there would be increased publicity for parents applying for reception places, and more outreach work. Protocols have been established for schools and admissions staff to clarify key areas of the process.

Question 6: *Can you provide figures to show how many Southwark pupils got their first choice of secondary school, how many got none of their choices and how many got no school at all in the first round of allocations?*

1.19 The executive member reported that 66 percent (1725) of pupils were offered their first preference for secondary schools. Eleven and a half percent (303 pupils) were allocated to a school that was not a preference. All Southwark pupils got an offer, which was better than neighbouring boroughs such as Lewisham and Lambeth.

Question 7: *What percentage of Southwark children accepted places out of borough or at private schools, and how does that compare with other London boroughs?*

1.20 The committee was informed that 76.2 percent of Southwark children had accepted school places in Southwark; and just over one percent at private schools in the borough. Twenty-two and a half percent accepted places outside the borough.

Question 8: *The common admissions form has streamlined the process of applying to schools, however what plans do you have for streamlining the admissions criteria for each school to prevent children who live in certain areas from falling between differing schools admissions criteria?*

1.21 The executive member said this was a complex area. Each academy, voluntary aided school and foundation school was its own admissions authority as well as the council.

The council ensured its own Southwark schools were a model of best practice and guidance was given to all schools each year. The government was currently consulting on a draft code.

1.22 Any problems, for example if children fell between criteria, should be reported to the admissions forum to look into. A member was keen to discuss their experiences with the executive member directly.

1.23 The headteacher representative reported that primary schools were concerned about the level of advice available for parents applying for reception places, and asked that the concern be noted. Officers said that Surestart and other early years should be supporting families of young children. The executive member added that increased publicity and the appointment of school preference advisors should help.

1.24 The committee further discussed the admissions process. Officers confirmed that Southwark was a net exporter of pupils, so members concluded that there should be capacity to provide more places across the borough. The headteacher commented that 16 to 19 years was a particularly large area of export for Catholic pupils as there was no Catholic provision in Southwark, which was an issue. Other members suggested that more Southwark schools developing sixth form places could help. A point was made that often parents had unrealistic expectations when putting down school preferences, and it was important that all six preferences were listed as well as details such as aspirations.

Question 9: *Could you outline the strategy for improving the academic performance of Looked After Children?*

1.25 The executive member first commented that the education attainment of looked after children (LAC) was a priority both nationally as well as locally, and the council needed to be ahead of the game. She mentioned that the first Corporate Parenting Panel had looked at the 'Show me how I matter' report, and commented on some of the measures that the council had in place for looked after children:

– a personal plan for every looked after child that was regularly monitored
– a home tuition service for GCSE children (1 hour tutorial per week)
– support for foster placements – all have computers and access to the London Grid for Learning, as well as access to toy libraries and materials.
– help for achieving training and employment opportunities
– an awards scheme to celebrate achievements.

Question 10: *What do initial school results indicate in relation to achievements of Looked After Children for 2006?*

1.26 The provisional results were that two-thirds of the LAC had achieved more than 5 A* to G grades, and one-fifth had five A* to C grades. The numbers of LAC achieving A and A* grades had increased and there were some individual examples of excellence e.g. one LAC had been accepted at medical school.

Question 11: *Could you comment on the measures the council is taking in the field of behaviour management of pupils and 'low level disruption'?*

1.27 The executive member said there was a huge range of initiatives, and gave some examples. These included the development of a multi-agency behaviour strategy, support given to schools by Behaviour and Autism Support Service, the Behaviour

Improvement Programme, anti-bullying strategies, and the SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) programme which 28 primary schools are involved in.

1.28 In response to further questions, the executive member confirmed that there were multi-agency teams helping out in schools, and that the council's Behaviour and Autism Support Service provided behavioural support to schools and support to newly qualified teachers.

1.29 A member asked whether past initiatives for school councils – such as the rights and responsibilities contract and the karrot scheme – were still in place. The executive member confirmed that the karrot scheme was; she was not aware of the rights and responsibilities contract.

1.30 The strategic director of education added that nearly all of the Ofsted reports in the previous year were very positive about children's behaviour.

Question 15: *How will extended schools develop in terms of life long learning?*

1.31 The executive member told the committee that she was excited about extended schools. It affected not only the school community but also the local community, and ensured continuous education for life-long learning e.g. IT skills, other languages, employment skills, or for personal development. The executive had linked the use of tenants' and residents' halls with this work.

1.32 She added that life-long learning would include family learning – such as numeracy and healthy eating. It was important that people could go somewhere close to where they lived, and it was also important that schools worked together in providing extended learning. She confirmed that schools seemed keen to do this, and she was looking forward to seeing how schools would react to and engage with it.

1.33 A member asked whether consideration had been given to life-skills such as plumbing and carpentry. The executive member said this needed to be developed as part of the programme.

Question 16: *The C&YPP identifies that 10% of Southwark's young people identify their faith as Christian and 10% as Muslim. Do you agree that an important aim of the council should be to encourage young people to understand, and be tolerant of, different faiths? Does the C&YPP anywhere identify this as a specific priority or target? If not, should it do so? What, if anything, can and should the council do to achieve this aim?*

1.34 Members clarified that this question should read that 60% of Southwark's young people identify their faith as Christian, not 10% as stated.

1.35 The executive member confirmed that this was not a specific target in the C&YPP, and explained that targets were based on areas where the need for improvement had been identified. There was no evidence that young people in Southwark were less tolerant and understanding of different faiths than any other borough. An HMI theme inspection of religious education in Southwark schools had found the standard of religious education to be satisfactory.

1.36 A member commented that even if Southwark was better than other boroughs, it should still be seen as a priority that could be always be improved on. He urged the council to consider this.

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1.37 The committee were told about the development of the C&YPP, and how it had marked the progression of the Young Southwark partnership into the local Children's Trust. The plan identified where the focus needed to be, based on what parents and pupils had said. This was the first plan and it was subject to review.

1.38 A member mentioned there was an agreed syllabus for religious education, which was available on-line. Religious education at GCSE level was one of the fastest growing subjects in the borough.

Question 17: *How will you ensure that the work being done through Southwark Alliance and CIDU to encourage more diversity in school governors is reflected in the appointing system?*

1.39 The executive member explained that there were different types of governors. The council only appointed LEA governors. This was done through community councils. She said that they had been working with the Community Involvement Development Unit (CIDU) and the Southwark Alliance to attract a more diverse range of applicants – for example by training sessions with minority ethnic communities, and establishing a parents' forum.

1.40 She felt that councillors had the authority to find people and believed that community councils should ask about diversity as part of the appointment process. It was an issue; governors should reflect the local community.

Question 18: *How far are local strategies now in place to reduce the level of teenage pregnancies in Southwark? Are there any more recent figures than 2004 (cited in Southwark News) and do they demonstrate an improvement? What recent developments have there been in a) improving access to support services b) training youth workers and teachers?*

1.41 The executive member said there was a huge amount of work going on to reduce teenage pregnancy, and there were challenging targets to meet. The council had looked at strategies used in other boroughs and had adjusted the Southwark strategy accordingly. Measures included increased coverage of emergency contraception, and sex and relationship support.

1.42 In terms of figures, she reported there had been 70 teenage conceptions in the second quarter of 2005. While this was the lowest figure in a number of years – indicating a 10 percent drop rather than the standard two percent – the executive member cautioned that this was a snapshot and the overall results for the year may be different.

1.43 The executive member told the committee about the government's 'deep dive' reviews which had identified areas that were most effective in reducing teenage pregnancy. These included: targeted work for vulnerable groups including looked after children, young people-focused sex and relationship services that they could trust, local sponsorship and the engagement of all key partners, and strong delivery of SRE/PSHE in schools.

1.44 The under-16 conception and abortion rate was a very serious concern in Southwark. When asked why Southwark's rate was so bad, the executive member said research had identified deprivation, educational attainment and low self-esteem as key factors.

Question 19: *Are we likely to see any decrease in teenage pregnancy figures as a result of adopting good practice from other boroughs?*

1.45   [Refer to question 18 above for response]

Question 22: *In a recent report the "Boyhood to Manhood" organisation criticised the police support to schools project saying a great deal still needs to be done to address mental health problems of black teenage boys and that this should be the way forward. Health and Social Care Scrutiny has looked at accessibility of mental health services for young people particularly young black men. Has there been progress on the recommendations of that scrutiny?*

1.46   The executive member said that there were over 20 recommendations in the report. She outlined some of the work that was going on in this area:

–   a number of voluntary organisations had been engaged to provide interventions, including Fairbridge and From Boyhood to Manhood
–   additional support to young carers
–   early interventions to identify mental health issues

1.47   The Chair thanked the executive member for her time.

RESOLVED:

That the executive member for children's services and education provide written responses to the following interview questions: 2, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21 and 23-27.

2.   EXTENDED SCHOOLS [pages 4 - 34]

2.1   The assistant director, community strategy, introduced this item by updating the committee on the previous night's executive consideration of the extended schools strategy. Executive had approved the draft extended schools strategy, adding four points to the recommendations:

–   recognition that schools serve both the school community and the local community
–   playgrounds should be available for use by others outside of school hours
–   need for strong safe-guarding procedures to be in place to support extended school activities
–   for officers to report back to executive in March 2007 in conjunction with the tenants halls review as part of a comprehensive review of community facilities.

2.2   The assistant director outlined the core offer entitlement that all schools needed to be able to demonstrate by 2010 i.e. wrap-around childcare, varied menu of activities, parenting support, referral to specialist support services and wider community access to school facilities. He directed the committee to page 8 of the extended schools strategy which indicated where schools were currently with providing this.

2.3   He also stressed that not all schools would be able to deliver the core entitlement directly as they were unlikely to attract enough people to be sustainable. Schools did, however, need to arrange access to it. Partnership working would be very important. All schools would be inspected by Ofsted to ensure they were providing access to extended schools services.

2.4   While members welcomed the scheme, a number of concerns were raised. A member questioned the impact extended schools would have on the teaching profession, and whether a parallel professional would be created with development

opportunities as per the Denmark experience. Officers said there was no expectation that teachers would deliver the extended schools activities themselves, but there was an expectation that they would look at the wider teaching community.

2.5   Members identified funding as an issue. Officers agreed, adding that not everyone would be able to afford to pay for additional activities. There was opportunity to tap into funding through the voluntary sector.

2.6   The headteacher representative said it was fair to say that secondary school heads were very concerned about sustainability and funding. He also expressed nervousness about talk of schools being creative in using teaching staff. Practicalities around who would run the services was an issue.

2.7   Members reflected on their own experiences around extended school activities. One member reported initial apprehension about Waverley's full service extended schools status because of concerns it would distract from the core business of learning, but found that this not to be the case because the school used external providers. Other members commented on the benefits of breakfast clubs – both in improving attendance and punctuality and in better cohesion at the beginning of the school day.

2.8   Members discussed how to approach the review. They suggested looking at the following issues:

- – sustainability and funding
- – responsibility for running the services
- – relationship with the community
- – interschool and partnership working with voluntary sector and community groups.

2.9   It was suggested that the committee could visit the Southwark schools that were already providing full extended services, as well as learn lessons from independent schools that had been providing the services for some time.

2.10   Other comments made were:

- – the need to be cautious about things the committee cannot influence
- – whether to focus on primary schools
- – there could be a number of different models for extended school services e.g. one school may be open from 8:30am until 3:30pm and use external providers for extended school activities, another may be open from 8am until 10pm and provide activities themselves
- – the benefits of drawing in hard to reach families, for example through communication and language considerations.

3   PUPIL VOICE [pages 35 – 94]

3.1   The head of management information and analysis (MIA) presented the pupil voice survey of year five and year nine pupils to the committee. He provided background information about the survey, including when it was carried out and the type of questions and outlined general changes between the pilot survey in 2005 and the 2006 survey. Information from the pupil voice surveys would be combined with the results of the MORI resident survey to form a comprehensive report. He stressed that it was important that schools were encouraged to participate in the survey and an important way of ensuring this was that the anonymity of individual schools was maintained in the Southwark reports.

3.2 The head of MIA then presented the committee with a selection of interesting findings from the report. This included, for example, the numbers of pupils who said they had dropped litter recently compared to the number of children who wanted the streets to be clean and tidy; as well as the proportion of children who reported responding to the survey truthfully.

3.3 Specific data was presented to the committee around bullying to assist in the bullying review. This included the percentage of pupils who had reported being bullied, the types of bullying, whether the pupils thought the school took action against bullying, and whether they had an adult to talk to when they were worried. Overall, there had been an improvement from the previous year's results.

3.4 Officers commented that it was interesting to look at the association between responses to different questions – for example the level of bullying and number of children who reported being bored in lessons. It was also noted that the level of bullying reported in the survey could be influenced by pupil's understanding of what bullying means e.g. some schools may have a better understanding of this.

3.5 Other observations about the survey generally were:

- the survey was voluntary but was valuable to schools as it could provide a year upon year comparison as to the views of its pupils and areas they could work on. The survey was based on perceptions, rather than necessarily what may be the situation in reality
- the pupil response rate was included in the survey results for each question
- results might differ from year to year depending on the particular cohort of children in a year. For example, pupils may report feeling less safe at school one year if there was a group of pupils causing problems at school, but once the troublesome pupils had moved on the reported levels of safety may improve.

3.6 The head of MIA was thanked for his interesting and informative presentation.

4 BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE [pages 95 – 98]

4.1 The scrutiny project manager briefly updated the committee with where things had got with the bullying review. A questionnaire was being developed to send to schools about the development of the anti-bullying policies. 'Speaker Box' had been approached about whether they wanted to put forward their views on behalf of looked after children.

4.2 Members were keen to hear from Beatbullying at their next meeting.

4.3 Other points made by members were:

- the importance of talking to children and young people. Teacher and pupil perspectives may be different if you could talk to them separately
- how it would be useful to also seek views from schools that had not been involved in Pupil Voice
- whether to build in an awareness of gang issues.

4.4 The headteacher representative offered the committee a visit to the St Thomas Apostle College as part of the review.

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4.5   Members responded positively to the director of education's suggestion that councillors build up relationships with two or three schools in the borough. This would establish a core contact and reference group. The headteacher representative thought this was a good idea, adding that some thinking was needed about how it would work at a practical level.

5   WORK PROGRAMME [page 99]

5.1   The scrutiny project manager said an item on local school performance had been scheduled for November 2006. However while the local school performance results were available, the national comparators were unlikely to be available until early 2007.

5.2   Members decided to defer the item until the national comparators were available. A suggestion was made to bring the 'providing more for young people to do' review forward as it linked with extended schools.

The meeting closed at 10:00pm.

CHAIR:

DATE: