



EDUCATION, YOUTH & LEISURE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the EDUCATION, YOUTH & LEISURE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2003 at 7.00 PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Andy Simmons (Chair)
Councillor Lisa Rajan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Kenny Mizzi, Graham Neale and Robert Smeath

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mr G Agomuo
The Venerable Douglas Bartles-Smith
Mrs J Spanswick

OFFICERS: Romi Bowen – Deputy Director, Social Services
Chris Bull – Strategic Director of Social Services
Alison Delyth – Deputy Director, CEA@Southwark
John Guest – Head of Social Inclusion, CEA@Southwark
Karen Murphy – Legal Services
Claudette Murray – Legal Services
Denise Skidmore – Head of Access & Inclusion, CEA@Southwark
Peter Roberts – Scrutiny Team

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alun Hayes.

RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect of an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute file and is available for public inspection.

The Sub-Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the minute file. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the item bearing the same number on the agenda.

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 28 October 2003 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

1. LONG TERM REVIEW OF EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

- 1.1 Members of the Sub-Committee expressed concern that the Office for Public Management [OPM] report on the long term review of education support services was not available for consideration. The meeting had been expressly timetabled to consider this report on a date agreed with OPM, CEA@Southwark and Education Officers. Arranging a special meeting for the following Monday, at short notice, had been extremely difficult and prevented all members of the Sub-Committee from having the opportunity to offer their views before the report was submitted to the Executive. The Diocesan representatives were particularly inconvenienced.
- 1.2 The Sub-Committee considered the review to be a most important part of its work programme this year. The Sub-Committee indicated that it would not find it acceptable to consider the report after the Executive had already sent the report out for consultation.

RESOLVED That the Chair write to the Chief Executive passing on the above views and making it clear that the Sub-Committee expects to receive a full explanation on Monday evening (24 November 2003) as to the reasons for the delay in completing the report and that it expects that such an important issue will be better handled in the future.

2. GREEN PAPER "EVERY CHILD MATTERS"

- 2.1 The Strategic Director and the Deputy Director of Social Services briefed the Sub-Committee on the Green Paper, "Every Child Matters". The Strategic Director explained that the Council was at the end of its consultation process on the Green Paper, following which a response would be drafted and submitted to the Executive.
- 2.2 The Deputy Director outlined the aims, key messages and themes of the Green Paper. The aims were that no child fell through the net and that every child achieved its potential; that the balance shift towards prevention; and that services intervened earlier. Key messages included:

- Clear accountability;
 - Integrating education, health and social care services around the needs of the child;
 - Raising the priority of child protection across all services;
 - Creating a lead inspectorate for children to ensure services were held to account;
 - Creating a Children’s Commissioner;
 - Raising the attractiveness of working with children;
 - Sharing information between services in order to pick up warning signs; and
 - Increasing the focus on supporting families and foster carers.
- 2.3 The Deputy Director stressed the themes of taking responsibility for the protection of children and ensuring that every organisation had a positive vision and high expectations. Outcomes for children were seen as being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being.
- 2.4 The Strategic Director of Social Services indicated the principles underpinning the proposed reforms:
- Changing the relationship between universal and specialist services;
 - A multi-disciplinary approach;
 - Child and family centred;
 - Outcome focused; and
 - Common leadership.
- 2.5 The Strategic Director and the Deputy Director of Social Services emphasised that Southwark had already been working towards a whole system approach to children’s services. The Green Paper underplayed integration with health, which the Council had already begun to encompass.
- 2.6 Members of the Sub-Committee felt that it was important to widen the definition of “health” beyond the purely physical. The Strategic Director commented that there were significant issues in Southwark relating to children’s mental health and that a lot of the desired outcomes taken together could be described as “well-being”.
- 2.7 In response to Members’ questions, the Strategic Director gave examples of established relationships between social services and education, including Early Years centres, the Sure Start projects, intervention in primary schools and work with looked after children. There were similar examples where the health services were also involved. The aim was to introduce a co-ordinated approach to integrated working. Full engagement with head-teachers would be necessary in order to plan the required systems. The Strategic Director reported that more social workers had been recruited in the past year and that family resource teams had been created. These teams would be launched the following week and head-teachers would be given full access.

- 2.8 The Strategic Director explained that political leadership for Southwark's response to the Green Paper would come from the Executive. The aim was to ensure children's services were co-ordinated and that there was clear political and officer leadership. The proposal for a Children's Trust would enable services currently not within the governance of local authorities to be part of the same structure. In Southwark there were over 600 voluntary sector projects working with children.
- 2.9 In respect of recruitment and retention, the Deputy Director reported that there had been success in the area of children's social work. Campaigns had been undertaken through the technical press, Southwark was one of the top paying employers in London, and bursaries were offered to students in their last year of training. Front line posts had been filled but due to the nature of the work there were still turnover issues. The lessons learned from this area could be applied in areas such as health visiting and teaching.

RESOLVED That the Strategic Director of Social Services submits the Executive report on the Green Paper to the meeting of the Sub-Committee on Monday 24 November 2003 for comment.

3. EXCLUSIONS FOR 2002-2003 ACADEMIC YEAR

- 3.1 The Head of Access & Inclusion briefed the Sub-Committee on exclusions in the 2002-2003 academic year. There had been a significant reduction in exclusions over the past three years with the number of permanent exclusions down to a level of 50 pupils per year. There was concern about particular groups of pupils, which was important in focusing any intervention; the majority of exclusions were boys and there was a disproportionate number of black African and Caribbean pupils.
- 3.2 Guidance had been strengthened, making it more difficult for decisions regarding one-off incidents to be challenged – only one pupil had been reinstated following an appeal in the past year. At the same time it was essential to ensure that pupils were well represented. A major amount of support had been mobilised for pupils and schools in order to reduce the number of exclusions. Early intervention was key.
- 3.3 The Head of Access & Inclusion outlined the work of the Behaviour Improvement Project (BIP) that currently supported 4 secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. An important element of the work was the provision of structured learning from the first day of exclusion. At the same time, schools should not see this as an option for permanent holding. The aim was to support pupils so that they could return to school and not be excluded again. The work of the BIP was being evaluated with a view to using its strategies in other schools.
- 3.4 The work of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) was stressed. Members asked who was responsible for referring pupils to a PRU. The Head of Access & Inclusion responded that work was underway to improve processes for referral. Currently, all admissions were made through the Access and Inclusion Team who were monitoring the effective use of spaces. There was an increasing pressure to look for other options and private providers were being considered.

- 3.5 Re-drafting of the Behaviour Support Plan would provide additional support to schools. Better behaviour support strategies, and building the expertise of schools and teachers, would reduce the number of marginalized pupils.
- 3.6 The Head of Access & Inclusion stated that fixed term exclusions were as much a problem as permanent ones, particularly where pupils were excluded for periods up to 45 days. After this length of time it was difficult to re-integrate pupils. Limited cases of “off-rolling” needed to be addressed as soon as they came to light and measures taken to ensure schools were following processes to the letter.
- 3.7 Members of the Sub-Committee felt that a further breakdown of statistics would be useful – in terms of how many exclusions lasted 45 days and how many exclusions took place in single sex as opposed to mixed sex schools. The Head of Social Inclusion pointed out that a high priority was given to meetings considering fixed-term exclusions – Officers gave full support in order to ensure that guidance was followed and that schools were aware of alternatives. Members also wanted to know how off-rolling was discovered and what action was taken in respect of the schools in question. The Deputy Director, CEA@Southwark, indicated that off-rolling was often only identified at the point where the relationship between pupil and school had totally broken down. A gap could occur between the pupil’s last attendance and Officers becoming aware of the problem. However, formal action would be taken in respect of schools and their governing bodies.
- 3.8 Members questioned how support from other agencies could be used more effectively. The Head of Social Inclusion indicated that collaborative work was already taking place, such as within Youth Offending Teams and the Early Intervention Team. The Green Paper stressed the need to build these systems into mainstream working. The Head of Access & Inclusion indicated that there were particular issues with some groups of pupils, for instance those pupils on the edge of crime. Active support needed to be mobilised from partnership agencies. Officers would be visiting Orchard Lodge to see if it could be better used.
- 3.9 In response to Members’ questions on budgets available to deal with excluded pupils, the Head of Access & Inclusion explained that £1.5m had been allocated to the Behaviour Improvement Project (BIP) in its first year and there was now to be a further 5 years but with the budget contracting. Changes in Government requirements had meant that a greater number of schools had to be included. Approximately £4m had been available through learning support units and learning mentors. The Head of Access & Inclusion commented that BIP was split across a growing number of schools and that the provision of structured learning from day one of exclusion was an expensive exercise. She agreed to provide a further breakdown of resources to Members.
- 3.10 Members asked what happened if pupils could not be reintegrated back into schools following exclusion. The Head of Access & Inclusion indicated that a small number of pupils found it difficult to function in a mainstream setting and that a continuum of provision was necessary. It was essential that intervention be made in the very early years when patterns were first established. She agreed to bring case studies and plans back to Members as examples.

- 3.11 The Head of Social Inclusion commented that it was important to ensure that schools had considered special educational needs. It was also important that parents were supported and helped to be active partners in the education process.
- 3.12 Members of the Sub-Committee asked for further information in respect of the exclusions relating to Black African and Caribbean pupils. The statistics needed to be looked at in the context of the demography of a particular school and of the borough. Case studies were essential in order to fully understand the circumstances around individual exclusions. It was possible that, for instance, violent incidents could result from racist/sexist abuse or bullying and that exclusion was not appropriate. Members asked to be provided with case studies where there had been considerable Officer involvement – resulting in exclusion and where exclusion had not been agreed. Members asked for information on the sharing of good practice between schools.
- 3.13 Members asked whether there was any information available on staff and governors' attitudes to exclusion. Officers commented that the behaviour of children was a direct product of the circumstances in individual schools. Robust management systems needed to be in place and supported by governors. Good practice needed to be shared and teachers and governors provided with suitable professional development.
- 3.14 Members asked whether there was a strategy and targets for re-integration of pupils. The Head of Access & Inclusion indicated that this needed to be considered. Currently, pupils tended to stay in PRUs longer than in other boroughs where they were considered to be purely a short-term intervention. PRUs were the only facility for permanently excluded pupils in Southwark. Members also queried the cost of retaining pupils in such facilities. Officers commented that the cost was high. At the same time, the children concerned were often the most vulnerable in the borough such as looked after children. Investment in intervention and initiatives led to fewer exclusions and teachers and schools better able to support children. Early intervention was crucial.

- RESOLVED**
1. That Officers provide a further breakdown of statistics relating to exclusions:
 - The length of each exclusion;
 - Numbers of exclusions taking place in single sex and mixed-sex schools; and
 - Exclusions set against the demography of schools and of the borough.
 2. That Officers provide case study examples of exclusions:
 - Examples of off-rolling and action taken;
 - Examples where reintegration was not possible; and
 - Examples of cases in which Officers were highly involved (both where exclusion was the outcome and where it was not).

3. That Officers provide details of the resources available to deal with excluded pupils; and
4. That Officers provide examples of good practice in schools and how this is shared across schools in Southwark.

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS IN SOUTHWARK

- 4.1 The Deputy Director, CEA@Southwark, briefed the Sub-Committee on school admissions. She stressed that more work was necessary at year 6 when pupils were on the point of transfer to secondary schools. The introduction of the co-ordinated admissions policy was significant and plans were being made to work with the voluntary sector to communicate the new arrangements to parents. It was essential that an admissions policy gave priority to placing looked after children.
- 4.2 Members of the Sub-Committee highlighted the issue of the low percentage of families obtaining their first preference. They wondered if head-teachers should play a more active role in ensuring that individual pupils' preferences were appropriate. The Deputy Director agreed that this was essential and that information could be improved. Members also asked for future updates on management of the appeals procedures.
- 4.3 Members queried the number of new arrivals into the borough's schools. Officers clarified that there was a lot of movement generally, throughout the year, and that this impacted on school performance in Southwark. It was important to note that new arrivals were often some of the most promising students. The issue of new arrivals to the country, without English as a language, was also relevant. Overall, the total number of pupils in Southwark schools was pretty stable, however the borough lost more children at the transfer from year 6 to year 7 than were coming in at this point. It was hoped that the pan-London admission arrangements would address this.
- 4.4 Members also queried the system available in terms of casual and late admissions. The Deputy Director responded that there was a need for clear protocols and procedures. Efforts were being made to improve the reception area and to train staff. There was also a need for a stronger link to Education Welfare and the Attendance Service. Support could be provided to children in the period they were not in a school and during the appeals process. She commented that ultimately Southwark had the power to direct schools to admit children or to go to the Secretary of State to determine direction.
- 4.5 The Deputy Director indicated that a paper on 2005 admissions to primary schools was being prepared for consultation. A similar paper in respect of secondary schools would follow this.

- RESOLVED**
1. That Officers submit the consultation papers on admissions to the Sub-Committee for consideration; and
 2. That Officers bring action plans in respect of any points of concern raised by the Sub-Committee and not covered in the consultation papers, including:

- The low percentage of families obtaining their first preference;
- Management of the appeals procedures; and
- The system for casual and late admissions.

5. WORK PROGRAMME 2003/2004

5.1 The work programme was noted.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 The Forward Plan was noted.

The meeting finished at 9.40 pm.

CHAIR:

DATE: