

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 16th March 2011**

PRESENT – Councillors Desai, Foster, Gee, O’Keeffe, Oldfield, Patel, Surve and Tapp.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS – F. Kershaw and B. Simpson.

Also Present – Councillor M. Bateson – Executive Member Children’s Services, J. Berry, P. Conlon and N. Ghani.

RESOLUTIONS

42. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed those present and apologies from Councillor Law-Riding and members of the Youth Forum were recorded.

43. Minutes of the Meeting held on 26th January 2011

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2011 be received and signed as a correct record.

44. Declarations of Interest in items on this Agenda

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

45. Work of the Executive

Portfolio Budget Position

The Executive Member outlined the current budget position for her portfolio reporting that the portfolio was still on target for a balanced budget at the end of the year. There may be slight overspend which was being monitored. The Committee noted the increasing number of children in care fostered and the rise in number of foster carers.

Forward Plan

Reference was made to N1070 – Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people. Members queried how deliberate and unintentional injuries were determined, the possible difficulties in differentiating between the two in some cases and reporting arrangements. Members noted that work was being done on this indicator however suggested that more focus should be placed on children’s health under the new structure in the new municipal year.

Members went on to discuss other indicators including Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) – NI051 Effectiveness of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and NI045 - Young offenders engagement in suitable education, employment or training. It was noted that the authority should be commended on the academic performance indicators.

RESOLVED – That the Work of the Executive be noted.

46. Budget and Service Reviews of the Children’s Services portfolio

The Executive Member outlined the Councils budget position and updated the Committee on service reviews and future spending plans.

Members were provided with a copy of appendix B from the Finance Council agenda report, an overview of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on service reviews and a briefing on the Interim Report of the Munro Review (Feb 1st 2011).

Areas covered in discussion included:

- Social care
- Children’s centres
- Change in senior judiciary and its implications
- Pressures arising from the introduction of new national minimum standards, statutory guidance and amended regulations

RESOLVED – That the update on the budget and service reviews of the Children’s Services portfolio be noted.

47. Work of the Youth Forum

The Committee noted that the Youth Forum were unable to attend today’s meeting due to other commitments such as the Youth Elections and study, however the Vice Chair would meet with the Youth Forum in order to ensure they were on track and advise them of the possibility of reporting back to the Policy and Review Committee.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That the Youth Forum be invited to make a presentation on progress on their project on Citizenship and Democracy to the Policy and Review Committee and the Vice Chair of the Committee arrange to meet with the representatives of the Forum to ensure that the project is proceeding along the lines agreed with the Committee prior to that presentation.

48. Attainment and Achievement of Children in the Borough 2009/10

The Committee received a report back from the sub group set up to examine the issue of interventions used to improve attainment in hard to reach groups of pupils and recommendations on how this can be used to benefit all children. The Committee were asked to note the work of the group and agree that the Executive Member examine ways of ensuring that the dissemination of good practice continue in the future, seeking to ensure the maximum benefits could be gained to ensure continuing improvement in attainment.

Members received the report and discussed related issues including the baccalaureate and its impact on attainment figures, consultant teachers, School Improvement Officers (SIO) and NVQ's.

There were questions on the recent reports of pupil behaviour at Darwen Vale High School. The Director of Education explained the process in place for issues of problem behaviour to be picked up. It was noted that there was no behaviour problem at the school, but personnel and HR issues. Actions for progressing the situation had been agreed. The Committee was legally advised at this point to move into Part 2 if they wished to discuss the case in further detail. A vote was taken not to discuss any further.

RESOLVED –

1. That the work of the group on the issue of attainment and the information set out in the report be noted.
2. That the Executive Member examine ways of ensuring that the dissemination of good practice on attainment continues in the future and seeks to get as many schools as possible to work together to ensure that the maximum benefits can be gained from this to ensure the continued improvement of attainment of children in schools in the LEA.

49. Developments in Schools

As requested at the previous meeting, the Committee was provided with written reports on academies and Free Schools, Pupil Premium and Service buy back by schools from the LEA.

49.1 Academies and Free Schools

Harry Devonport, Director of Education, briefed the Committee on the potential implications of the Academies Bill and the establishment of Free Schools.

Members noted:

- Free Schools could be set up by a wide range of proposers, including charities, universities, businesses, educational groups, teachers and groups of parents. Proposers have to demonstrate evidence of demand.
- Independent schools could apply to become a Free School and become state-funded independent schools. These schools would need to meet the entry criteria.
- The Governing Bodies of LA maintained schools have the right to apply to the Secretary of State to convert to Academy status.
- The November White Paper indicates that the Secretary of State envisages that over a period of several years all schools will either be Academies or Free Schools.

Members considered the impact Free Schools and Academies would have on other Schools and BSF investment and areas such as admissions and exclusions, freedoms and flexibilities and governance.

The Executive Member welcomed Members to visit the Pleckgate High School site.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

49.2 Pupil Premium

As part of the School Funding Settlement announced on 13th December 2010 DfE announced that a Pupil Premium will be introduced from April 2011, paid to local authorities by means of a specific grant for deprived pupils, Looked After Children (LAC) and children whose parents are in the armed forces (service children).

Members noted the indicators which would be used and the level at which premium is set including the impact on Blackburn with Darwen. They further noted that schools were required to account for how they use the pupil premium – the LA had no power over its use.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

49.3 Service buy back by schools from the LEA

Members' received a report updating them on the services which were provided to schools, on an annual basis, from council departments and from the Strategic Partner, Capita Symonds, through Service Level Agreement documents.

Every year schools were offered a range of services from council departments and Capita Symonds. Schools reviewed their individual needs and decided which of the services they wished to subscribe to for the following financial year. Each service was outlined in detail in a Service Level Agreement (SLA) document. There were currently 19 services offered to schools, through SLA documents.

Members noted the LA was working closely in partnership with schools to develop services.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

50. Report to Policy and Review Committee

The Principal Officer commented that a series of interim recommendations were submitted and approved by the Policy and Review Committee. The report containing the recommendations was attached. Several responses had been given throughout the meeting and the additional following responses to the remaining recommendations were verbally reported under this item by the Executive Member.

Recommendation 1 – This item is on the agenda for the meeting and has been discussed earlier in the meeting under agenda item 8. A report was prepared for the meeting on behalf of the Director of Education

Recommendation 2 – An Equality Impact Assessment is being drawn up currently by PPP Team – in terms of improving performance if performance is sustained with diminished resources this represents improved efficiency, even if headline performance does not improve. The department will continue to strive to improve performance even with resource challenges.

Recommendation 3 and 4 – In the forthcoming draft Children, Young People and Families Plan the outcomes and achievements of school leavers and young adults entering into education, employment and training are areas that the Children, Young People and Families Trust will continue to focus on, especially in view of the historically high levels of youth unemployment.

Recommendation 5 – Sustaining the reach and positive impact of Children's Centres on local opportunities is at the very heart of the current review of the CC network – obviously with severely reduced funding for the borough there are constraints in what can be achieved however we will endeavour to continue to deliver the most comprehensive service possible and to meet the core offer. As part of the review we will adopt a flexible approach to achieving these aims.

Recommendation 6 – This is one of the options being explored as part of the CC review process.

Recommendation 7 – A sub group is meeting on the day of OSC to discuss items 7-9. It is likely that further work will transpire from the meeting. Councillor O’Keeffe is attending that sub group meeting.

Recommendation 10 – Further updates are due following meetings and development of the project.

Recommendation 11 and 12 – the department will not be covering this as Democratic Services will be leading on these items.

RESOLVED – That the response from the Executive to the Committees recommendations be noted.

51. Report and recommendations for submission to the Policy and Review Committee

The purpose of this item was to consider any recommendations that the Committee wished to put forward to Policy and Review Committee.

The Committee were invited to offer their views and comments on the information they had received and to consider recommendations for forwarding to the Executive Member.

Members discussed the information they had received and agreed that the following recommendations be forwarded to the Policy and Review Committee.

RESOLVED – That the following recommendations be submitted to the Policy and Review Committee for approval.

Academies and Free Schools

1. That the Committee be kept up to date on the current status of schools in the borough and any changes that may come about in the near future and the implications for education of our children.

Budget and Service Reviews

2. That the Committee note the assessment of the projected impact of budget reductions on performance and service delivery and would like to continue monitoring services to see whether services can actually improve performance due to focusing on the core issues relating to children.

3. That an impact assessment be drawn up to enable the Committee to measure the ways that performance and service delivery is effected.
4. That impact on children leaving school and entering education, training or employment be included in future monitoring.
5. That having regard for the continuing financial position of the council the view of this Committee is that Children's Centres should be a priority service based on the positive impact they have on areas such as education, early intervention and prevention, safeguarding, health and safety, childcare etc and that additional use of centres should be promoted to add value and ensure the sustainability of the service and assist in the promotion of growth.
6. That the possibility of closer joint working between the Children's Centres and schools be examined as a way forward and a more effective and efficient use of resources and that future developments to strengthen these links and the take up of services provided centrally be reported to future meetings of the successor committee.

Attainment

7. That the work of the group on the issue of attainment and the information provided to the attainment working group be noted.
8. That the Executive Member be requested to examine ways of ensuring that the dissemination of good practice on attainment continue in the future and seeks to get as many schools as possible to work together to ensure that the maximum benefits can be gained from this to ensure the continued improvement of attainment of children in schools in the LEA.
9. That the Executive Member be requested to examine alternative qualifications that are becoming available for children and how these are being introduced in the borough.

Blackburn LIFT Project

10. That the Committee notes the information on the Blackburn Lift Project and the implications for children's services and joint working and that the Successor Committee be kept up to date on progress on the development of the project and how this will lead to improved services and better joint working.

Citizenship and Democracy

11. That the Youth Forum be invited to make a presentation on progress on their project on citizenship and democracy to the

Policy and Review Committee and the Vice Chair of the Committee arrange to meet with the representatives of the Forum to ensure that the project is proceeding along the lines agreed with the Committee prior to that presentation.

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....