

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**EDUCATION AND VULNERABLE
CHILDREN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
15 JULY, 2015**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION AND VULNERABLE
CHILDREN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 15 JULY, 2015 AT 1400 HOURS IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 3
AND 4, COUNCIL HOUSE, BIRMINGHAM**

PRESENT: - Councillor Barry Bowles in the Chair;

Councillors Sue Anderson, Matt Bennett, Debbie Clancy,
Barbara Dring, Chauhdry Rashid, Valerie Seabright, Martin
Straker Welds and Alex Yip.

Richard Potter.

IN ATTENDANCE:-

Chris Atkinson – Assistant Director, Children with Complex Needs
Jill Crosbie – Head of Access to Education
Michael Day – Senior Solicitor
Colin Diamond – Interim Executive Director for Education, People Directorate
Seamus Gaynor – Head of Strategic Management, People Directorate
Alistair Gibbons – Executive Director for Children’s Services, People
Directorate
Nicky Hale – Fostering and Adoption Improvement Manager
Louisa Nisbett – Committee Manager
Andy Pepper – Assistant Director, Children in Care Provider Services
Amanda Simcox – Scrutiny Research and Policy Officer
Benita Wishart – Overview and Scrutiny Manager

NOTICE OF RECORDING

272 It was noted that the meeting was being webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council’s Internet site (www.birminghamnewsroom.com) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs. The whole of the meeting would be filmed except where there were confidential or exempt items.

APOLOGIES

273 Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Uzma Ahmed, Susan Barnett, Mike Sharpe also Samera Ali and Sarah Smith for their inability to attend the meeting.

An apology was also submitted on behalf of Gary Billing, Link Officer.

The Chairman welcomed some Trainee Educational Psychologists, a Social Worker and pupils from Plantsbrook and andsworth Wood Academy to the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

274 Members were reminded that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests relating to any items of business to be discussed at this meeting. If a pecuniary interest was declared a Member must not speak or take part in that agenda item. Any declarations would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Councillor Matt Bennett declared a non –pecuniary interest in the SEN report as supporter for SEN parents from as part of his working role.

MINUTES

275 The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June, 2015, having been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE

276 Andy Pepper made a presentation to the Committee with the use of the following presentation:-

(See document no. 1)

In addition Andy Pepper informed that there was a video on the BCC website to raise awareness and get commitment for Corporate Parenting. The 10 District Committees would be briefed on the matter including provision of training for Regulation 44 visits.

During the discussion that ensued and in response to questions the following points were made:-

1. Councillor Valerie Seabright commented on the positive work carried out and thanked Andy Pepper for all his hard work. She stated that involving Members from Districts was not as easy as it seemed and pointed out that some Districts had not appointed District Champions. Councillor McCarthy had been asked to raise the matter at the District Head's meeting. Councillor Valerie Seabright added that the item should be a standing item on all District Agendas and suggested that some of the data from the Corporate Parenting Board should be broken down to District and Ward level and used to keep Members informed.
2. In response to comments from Councillor Matt Bennett stressing the importance of the outcomes for children and querying the contribution made by the Corporate Parenting Board to the outcomes, Andy Pepper

answered that the strategy was strong and had been compiled by a number of Local Authorities that were outstanding and from using research on young people together with guidelines. He also spoke about the multi-disciplinary, multi-agency make-up of the Board who had the ability to bring about change and could look at issues that did not fit in any particular criteria.

3. Councillor Yip thanked Andy Pepper for preparing the update which he had taken on board. Whilst he appreciated there were some difficulties and he was very much behind the vision, the update seemed lacking in detail about timescales to deliver and the challenges faced. He queried what support would be available for Members.
4. The Chairman noted that the amount of pocket money paid to children was being reviewed. He referred to the Loudmouth Scheme used by some Birmingham Schools and hoped it would be delivered to all Birmingham Schools. Gary Billing was leading on this and he felt it was beneficial.
5. With regard to engaging children in the process, Andy Pepper said that hopefully information would be received from the Children In Care Council (CICC) regarding young people's issues. There was a concern that the CICC was not representative of the 1900 young people in care in Birmingham. They were putting together a virtual CIC Council and working on engagement with all partners and posting information on the website.
6. In terms of getting Members on Board, the aim was to have 10 District Champions and have the groups back up and working again. Part of Andy Pepper's role was to attend District meetings and speak to Councillors. A date for an induction meeting in September for Councillors was being considered.
7. Councillor Sue Anderson questioned the difference between Regulation 33 to Regulation 44 Visits and what action would be taken to ensure Members were on board. She asked whether Regulation 33 Visits would continue and whether Councillors would require additional training. Councillor Sue Anderson agreed it was an excellent way forward, Andy Pepper informed that an update on the challenges and outcomes would be reported to the Committee in future. Some dates for training on Regulation 44 Visits would be arranged and as part of a presentation to Districts. Birmingham Foster Carers and residential staff would be included. A report back would be made to the Committee regarding the Corporate Parenting Board and progress in the future.

CHILDREN IN CARE FOSTERING AND ADOPTION UPDATE

277

Nicky Hale and Andy Pepper made a presentation to the Committee with the use of the following presentation:-

(See document no. 2)

During the discussion that ensued and in response to questions the following points were made:-

1. A number of issues had been highlighted in particular the number of women, asian and male children in care. The issues were being looked at through the improvement plan.
2. Enquiries were now turned around in 48 hours and processes had been improved. A partnership had been secured with the University of Birmingham. Birmingham City Council had become a fostering friendly employer and staff could have time off to attend training and appointments etc. Foster Carers were being used as mentors. There had been 14 new Foster Carers since 30 March, 2015 and they were on target to recruit 19 others.
3. The Chairman had attended many events in the last few years and congratulated the staff for doing a good job. The officers asked that people be encouraged to become foster carers. There was likely to be an increase in the numbers leaving as a result of the rise in standards.
4. In reply to Councillor Seabright they were in the process of developing a Stay and Put Policy and trying to support/fund foster carers through the funding service.
5. Councillor Yip asked for extra statistics with regard to timescales for court proceedings, the processes to retain foster carers, the numbers of parents with multiple children, the numbers of children and the average number of children with each foster carer.
6. Councillor Rashid welcomed the report and stressed the importance of training to enable foster carers to carry out their job. He was concerned that Birmingham children were being looked after outside of Birmingham.
7. Nicky Hale spoke about action taken to meet the targets. They were looking to gain 90 Foster Carers. There were no more than 3 children placed with a foster carer unless they were related in which case up to 5 could be placed. Training was vital. The majority of children were placed in Birmingham
8. In response to questions from Councillor Bennett and Clancy a small Education Service was being set up to ensure the outcomes were realised. Processes were monitored, more visits carried out and Social Workers spoken to directly.
9. The Chairman praised the service as he had attended a statutory boarding school.

REVIEW OF PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS

278

The following report was submitted:-

(See document no. 3)

Andrew Ryan, Headteacher presented the report

The Chairman expressed a non-pecuniary interest as Vice-Chair on a Governing Body of a COBS and Chris Atkinson who was on a Governing Body.

During the discussion and In response to questions the following comments were amongst those made:-

1. The increase in permanent exclusions and concerns regarding the resources available and shortage of spaces at COBS was discussed. Concerns were raised in particular about the 2 to 6 year period spent by some children in the COBS unit. The purpose of the report was to consider a way forward. They were looking at identifying pathways for individuals in the process and would be visiting individual headteachers. Members spoke about the numbers of young people in the COBS unit and delay in assessing them.
2. Concerns relating to exclusions were raised by Councillors Sue Anderson and Councillor Matt Bennett and it was reported that there was support and guidance to ensure that the provision was correct.
3. In reply to concerns raised Colin Diamond, Executive Director stated that it had been acknowledged that the long term issues needed to be addressed. All schools should have a SEN Co-ordinator. Some information was requested on exclusions and qualifications at COBS during the autumn. The Chairman said that a report back on progress should be made as soon as possible.
4. Councillor Martin Straker-Wells spoke about working in partnership with Birmingham Education Partnership also the reasons pupils ended up in care. Some points were raised about pupil mobility and the amount of year 10 and 11 children travelling outside the area owing to lack of resources.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their report.

WHISTLEBLOWING UPDATE

279

The following briefing note from Legal and Democratic Services was received and noted:-

(See document no. 4)

Michael Day, Senior Solicitor briefly outlined the report. Since the report all the complaints had been responded to. In reply to a question related to the liability of Trustees of an Academy the EFA would be looking at this issue which would depend on the circumstances and facts.

The Chairman thanked the officer for attending the meeting.

WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The following work programme was received and noted:-

(See document No. 5)

- Benita Wishart encouraged Members to indicate their priorities and further areas they would like to explore.
- Councillor Martin Straker-Wells suggested that a task group was worth considering to look at specific items if necessary. Items suggested were:-
 - Exclusions and COBS
 - Birmingham Education Partnership (how they worked with Districts)
 - Effectiveness of the Governing Body
 - Monitor the work of LACES (Benita Wishart undertook to write to the Cabinet Member)
- The Chairman suggested that information could be requested from officers in writing. Benita Wishart together with the Chairman would consider the need for appropriate officers to attend the meeting.
- Councillor Sue Anderson reminded the Committee of the monitoring role of the Committee.
- Information could be emailed to Members in between meetings. Benita Wishart suggested a session for Members outside of the O & S meeting and undertook to write to the Cabinet office for some data as a starting point.

280

RESOLVED:-

That the Work Programme be noted.

DATES OF MEETINGS

It was:-

281

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That meetings be held on the following Wednesdays at 1400 hours in the Council House :-

2015

16 September
21 October
25 November
09 December

2016

20 January
10 February
23 March
20 April

REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

282 None were received.

AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS

283 **RESOLVED:-**

That in an urgent situation between meetings, the Chair jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

284 The Chairman agreed that the following items could be agreed as other urgent business.

- It was requested that the clarification be sought from the Cabinet Member regarding the £3 ½ M Grant for the Education Assessment Process.
- The issue of unaccounted children from the Education System was raised. The Vice Chairman would discuss the matter with the Chairman of the Committee with a view to considering the item for the Work Programme.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and their contributions at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 1700 hours.

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CHAIRPERSON