

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 10 JUNE 2015

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION AND VULNERABLE
CHILDREN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE 2015 AT 1530 HOURS IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 3
AND 4, COUNCIL HOUSE, BIRMINGHAM**

PRESENT: - Councillor Susan Barnett in the Chair; Councillors Matt Bennett, Barry Bowles, Debbie Clancy, Barbara Dring, Chauhdry Rashid, Valerie Seabright, Mike Sharpe, Martin Straker Welds and Alex Yip.

Samera Ali and Richard Potter.

IN ATTENDANCE:-

Garry Billing – Assistant Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding / Strategic Lead for Child Sexual Exploitation, People Directorate
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
Paul Holden – Committee Manager
Councillor Brigid Jones – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services
Amanda Simcox – Scrutiny Research and Policy Officer
Lindsey Trivett – Interim Head of Early Years, People Directorate
Benita Wishart – Overview and Scrutiny Manager

NOTICE OF RECORDING

260 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.

APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE AND CHAIRPERSON

261 The resolutions of the City Council appointing the Committee, Chairperson and Members to serve on the Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the City Council in 2016 were noted.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR

262 **RESOLVED:-**

That Councillor Barry Bowles be elected as Deputy Chair of this Committee.

APOLOGIES

263 Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Uzma Ahmed, Sue Anderson and Mrs Sarah Smith.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

264 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.

The Chair (Councillor Susan Barnett) provided notification that she had an interest as an employee with a PVI children's centre in Birmingham. Councillor Barry Bowles similarly declared the following interests: he was a governor of the City of Birmingham School; he was a member of the Friends of Fox Hollies Committee; and his daughter was the Deputy Headteacher of Oldknow Academy which had been involved in the Trojan Horse investigations.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following Terms of Reference were submitted:-

(See document No. 1)

265 **RESOLVED:-**

That the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

MINUTES

266 The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Valerie Seabright drew attention to paragraph h) in Minute No. 256 and considered that it was important that the suggestion that Governing Bodies undertake peer reviews be progressed.

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND SAFEGUARDING AND EDUCATION – MAY 2015

The following report was received:-

(See document No. 2)

- 267 Colin Diamond, Interim Executive Director for Education, People Directorate introduced the aspects of the report relating to Education and Schools. Furthermore, he indicated that he considered that 5.8 (Educational Infrastructure) was only technically a Red RAG rating due to the methodology used and that he did not believe 5.10 (Recruitment and Retention) to be a Green RAG rating, highlighting that this headline action hinged on the reputation of the City and there was a need for all the positive stories of what was happening in Birmingham to come to the fore.

Further to questions from Councillor Barry Bowles, the Interim Executive Director for Education undertook to provide written details of how many Statements of Special Educational Need had been converted and the number of Education Health and Care Plans in place.

In responding to questions and comments from Councillor Matt Bennett, the following were amongst the comments made:-

- a) More than 300 of the 437 schools in the City had signed-up to the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) and over and above the support provided to all maintained schools that were a cause for concern the schools that subscribed to the BEP received training events.
- b) It was reported that in terms of strengthening school governance there were two posts to be filled.
- c) Mobilising the BEP to become the service provider of school improvement by 1 September 2015 was on track; challenging but realistic improvement targets were being set.
- d) The five services referred to in 5.6 of the report were: Cityserve; Educational Psychology Service (EPS); Pupil and School Support (PSS); City Learning Centres; and PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies).
- e) Members were advised that the delays in respect of EPS and PSS were associated with such issues as safeguarding, governance etc.
- f) It was indicated that the reason why the information in 5.8 was unclear was because words of a programme methodology nature had been used.
- g) Early Years provision had moved from the Education Plan to the Children's Services Plan and the timescales of the commissioning project were now longer.

Alistair Gibbons, Executive Director for Children's Services, People Directorate introduced the parts of the report relating to Children's Social Care and Safeguarding and in highlighting that there was almost a full establishment of staff (though 35% were currently agency workers) questioned whether the RAG rating for workforce capacity and capability should be classified as Red.

During the discussion that ensued the following were amongst the issues raised and comments made in response to questions:-

- (a) Councillor Valerie Seabright welcomed the report but voiced concern regarding what appeared to be discrepancies between some of the RAG ratings provided and what was the reality on ground, as mentioned above by the Executive Directors. Furthermore, the Member voiced concern that there was no support data and considered that this should be provided in respect of all the Districts.
- (b) In response to comments made by Councillor Barry Bowles, Councillor Brigid Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services acknowledged that if there was an Ofsted inspection the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding service would be classified as inadequate; however she felt that an inspection was inconceivable at present given that Ofsted were aware that the Council had only completed the first year of its three year improvement plan.
- (c) The Executive Director for Children's Services considered that the underlying objective was about how to ensure that social workers carried out the extremely difficult job of engaging with disadvantaged families in a proactive and the most effective way. However, he felt that the quality of social worker practice was difficult to capture through RAG ratings.
- (d) Further to a question from the Chair, Seamus Gaynor, Head of Strategic Management, People Directorate indicated that it was for Members to decide on how frequently progress reports should be submitted to the Committee and whether they wished to receive papers on any specific improvement topics. The Chair undertook to seek Members' views in this regard.
- (e) The Chair asked that those Members who had not had an opportunity to put their questions to e-mail them to Benita Wishart, Overview and Scrutiny Manager by the end of the week so that written responses could be sought. She welcomed a suggestion that other Members be copied into the e-mails sent and agreed that the list of questions and answers could be appended to the Minutes when they were circulated with the agenda for the next meeting.
- (f) In supporting other comments made, the Chair advised the Executive Directors that she too considered that some of the language used in the report and RAG rating information that had been provided was unclear and confusing.

The Chair thanked the Executive Directors for reporting to the Committee and responding to questions and comments.

EARLY YEARS CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

268

The following report was received:-

(See document No. 3)

Lindsey Trivett, Interim Head of Early Years, People Directorate introduced the information contained in the report and informed Members that, "Not seeking to promote council engagement in the tendering process as a potential service provider" (fourth bullet point on page four of the report) would not now be

included in the commissioning model and instead be left to be determined through the consultation and communication process.

During the discussion that ensued the following were amongst the issues raised and comments made in response to questions:-

- a) In response to concerns expressed by Samera Ali, the Interim Head of Early Years indicated that the development of links and working between schools and PVI providers would form part of the consultation as would outcomes proposed and impact measures.
- b) Councillor Valerie Seabright had some concerns regarding the impact on nursery schools of introducing new arrangements part way through the year in October 2016.
- c) The Interim Head of Early Years concurred with comments made by Councillor Valerie Seabright that engagement with the workforce was key. It was also highlighted that in terms of the provision of early years services Academies were viewed no differently to PVI providers and that the Local Authority had a statutory duty to support quality improvement in settings that were not rated as good or outstanding.
- d) Further to comments made by Councillor Barry Bowles, the Interim Head of Early Years confirmed that 16 percent of three and four year olds were not receiving their 15 hours universal free entitlement and made reference to targeted work that was taking place. Members were also advised that details of the 30 hours provision for children of working parents had not yet been made available but that efforts were being made to future proof the proposed early years arrangements.
- e) Councillor Brigid Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised the Committee that there were variations in the levels of funding that was allocated depending on whether a child attended a nursery school, PVI nursery or a nursery class in a primary school. The formula was being reviewed.
- f) Further to questions from Councillor Debbie Clancy, the Interim Head of Early Years considered that service providers would be proactive in responding during the proposed consultation period and reported that as early years services were available in all areas across Birmingham it was not intended to target specific locations.
- g) In response to a question from the Chair, the Interim Head of Early Years indicated that the usual Council guidance would be followed in terms of providing information in different languages as part of the consultation exercise.
- h) Further to concerns expressed by Councillor Matt Bennett, the Interim Head of Early Years stressed that the Directorate was keen to ensure that the proposed consultation would be meaningful and undertook to ensure that plain language was used and not jargon.
- i) It was underlined that the take-up of nursery school places was not compulsory but it was hoped to drive this up higher than the current 84 percent. References were also made to the targeting of two year olds that was taking place.
- j) The Cabinet Member for Children's Services in responding to a question from Richard Potter referred to some of the reasons for pursuing a joint commissioning approach in respect of early years services and health visiting e.g. integrated working, the age range for which the services were being provided, economies of scale, efficiency savings.

- k) In response to a question from the Chair relating to the proposed consultation, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services commented that she would welcome the Committee making a submission and would be pleased to report back on the outcomes of the consultation at the appropriate time.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Interim Head of Early Years for reporting to the Committee and responding to questions and comments.

WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The following paper was received:-

(See document No. 4)

In response to questions from the Chair, the Executive Directors in attendance at the meeting indicated that their priorities were as follows:-

- Colin Diamond, Interim Executive Director for Education - Delivering the single Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan and ensuring that the Birmingham Education Partnership was in a position to deliver services on 1 September 2015; clarifying the curriculum entitlement of Birmingham children and young people by the end of the summer term, 2015; coordinating and aligning the multitude of different pathways (e.g. education, apprenticeship, training) for young people, which was an issue that would need to be progressed in the autumn; and improving communication with all 437 schools in an organised, clear and systematic way ready for September, 2015.
- Alistair Gibbons, Executive Director for Children's Services, People Directorate – To shape a whole system with a strong early help focus and where children flowed through it without delay; ensuring that the Local Authority was a place where children's social workers wished to work and they felt that they were achieving positive outcomes for children; and putting in place a quality assurance system so that what was happening on the ground could really be measured and the Council could respond confidently when Ofsted returned.

269

RESOLVED:-

That the Work Programme be noted.

DATES OF MEETINGS

It was:-

270

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That meetings be held on the following Wednesdays at 1400 hours in the Council House (monthly dates having been reserved with a view to planning all work i.e. Committee meetings, Inquiries etc, to fit into the schedule):-

2015

15 July
16 September
21 October
25 November
09 December

2016

20 January
10 February
23 March
20 April

- (ii) that approval be given to Wednesdays at 1400 hours being designated as a suitable day and time each week for any additional meetings required to consider 'requests for call in' which may be lodged in respect of Executive decisions.

AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS

271

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.

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

The meeting ended at 1703 hours.

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CHAIRPERSON