

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 24th January, 2012.

Present:- Councillors O'Connor (Chair), Davis, Minhas and Smith

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Dar and Sharif

PART 1

50. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

51. Minutes of the last Meeting

The minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on the 24 November 2011 were approved as a correct record.

52. Member Questions

No questions had been received prior to the meeting.

Resolved – that the number of families in Slough potentially impacted by the decision regarding the benefits cap be circulated to the Panel.

53. Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14

Clair Pyper, Director of Education and Children's Services presented the report to the Panel, explaining that the decision had been taken to continue producing the Children and Young People's Plan despite the removal of the legal requirement to do so as it is a key document, setting out priorities and incorporating Ofsted recommendations for improvement.

The Plan contains 5 priorities: Stay Safe; Early Intervention; Physical and Emotional Health; High Quality and Effective Education; and Effective Support for Young People. These priorities reflected the identified needs of children, young people and their families in Slough, based on the outcomes from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment; and would be owned and delivered by the Council and its partners.

The version of the Plan being considered by the Panel had been accepted by the Children's Partnership Board at its meeting on the 24 January 2012, along with recommending some specific amendments: there should be an explicit link made in Priority 3 between child and parental health; the introduction should contain an explicit reference to the Health and Well-being Board; Priority 5 should contain a reference to the outcomes of Positive for Youth

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which had been a shaper of the priority; and it should be clear that engaging children, young people and parents will be involved in planning.

The Panel recognised that the new Plan was concise and informative, and noted it was impressed by the work being done, which the Plan highlighted well. The Panel raised concerns around the current economic climate impacting on the aspirations set out, and Clair Pyper provided reassurance that the Children's Partnership Board's Commissioning Strategy aimed to shape the way funding was used to make services more effective, and decisions were taken mindful of what could be realistically delivered. The Improvement Board will also be looking at what money is put into the different tiers of need to ensure most effective use of all partner funding.

Members questioned how Priority 3 was being implemented, and were advised that this was the only priority that was completely within the remit of Health colleagues and that they would be able to provide details of the programmes being put in place, however, indicators such as obesity levels were a way of monitoring success. The Panel also discussed how the reduction in funding impacted on e-safety, and Clair Pyper commented that the LSCB Business Plan had elements aimed at reducing incidents of e-safety along with educating parents of the dangers. The Panel felt that further co-ordination of good work done in schools to combat cyber-bullying should be carried out.

Resolved:

- 1) to endorse the objectives and content of the revised Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14, including the suggested amendments from the Children's Partnership Board;
- 2) that an item on Priority 3 (Good Physical and Emotional Health) to look at what Health colleagues are doing and its impact, be added to a future agenda, possibly as a joint meeting with the Health Scrutiny Panel; and
- 3) the Charlie McGeachie be requested to raise the possibility of a co-ordinated approach amongst schools to tackle cyber-bullying at the next meeting of Slough Headteachers.

54. Safeguarding Improvement Plan

Clair Pyper, Director of Education and Children's Services, updated the Panel on the progress being made following the outcome of the Ofsted announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children in April 2011. The Improvement Plan was currently being amended to incorporate progress made since it was first published in November 2011, but the Panel was reassured that the objectives in the Plan remain the same.

The Panel discussed the main focus of work, which was the embedding of good practice in children's social care. Areas such as the performance of

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completing core assessments against approved timescales remain a concern but are showing considerable improvement. Margaret Dennison, Assistant Director of Education and Children's Services, informed the Panel that two areas that had been given priority were the Early Intervention Strategy and Training which would underpin other areas of improvement.

The Panel considered the work being done to engage partners so that they were fully participating in the delivery of the agenda. Other areas that the Panel recognised as vital to the success of the Improvement Plan are the inclusion of frontline professionals in the process, and the work being done to ensure this would take place. The Panel was keen to ensure that there was effective monitoring of progress against the Plan, and Clair Pyper confirmed that this was being done at Senior Management Team meetings, as well as educating frontline staff on how performance information can inform their work on a day to day level. The Panel was informed, however, that there was a need to establish a baseline on some performance indicators which were new, and these often involved soft information such as parental views, which were difficult to quantify.

Following questions regarding the recently announced restructure of Education and Children's Services, the Panel was reassured by Clair Pyper that work is in hand to strengthen the management structure in Children's Social Care. The Panel asked about caseload levels which were seen to be relatively acceptable at 15-18. Staff have been allocated to teams which reflect the thresholds for service, and this is enabling them to focus on improvement work.

The Panel discussed the issue of the quality of audits which was raised in the letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State dated 22 November 2011. Clair Pyper confirmed that this had been looked at but that it was the outcomes of the audits rather than the quality of audits themselves which had caused concern, and the Improvement Plan looked to address the quality of work being carried out by social care staff.

Resolved:

- 1) to receive the updated Improvement Plan; and
- 2) to regularly review progress against the objectives of the Improvement Plan.

(Following Agenda Item 6 the Panel adjourned for 5 minutes and reconvened at 7.30 p.m.)

55. The Increase in Children with Child Protection Plans and the Number of Children who are Looked After

Margaret Dennison, Assistant Director of Education and Children's Services, introduced the report informing the Panel about the level of work being done against rising demand for children's social care services in Slough. With the

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numbers of Looked After Children and Children on child protection plans increasing over the past two years, there has been a considerable demand on service delivery. Levels of intervention were being improved and people were getting the service they needed at whatever level they were in the system, as the examples of the Early Response Hub indicated.

The Panel discussed the situation of school places in Slough, and whether this had been a factor in some of the examples given. Robin Croft, Assistant Director Inclusion and Achievement, confirmed that this was not an issue of concern as schools are required to give priority to looked after children in their admissions policy.

The Panel raised concerns around training and the retention of qualified staff. Margaret Dennison stressed that a timely, thorough and consistent training programme would assist with the retention of staff as well as becoming an attraction to qualified social workers from elsewhere.

Jill Forrest, Gold Project, Project Manager – Family Placement Service (FPS), took the Panel through the Gold LAC project that had been agreed in October 2011. The main elements of work currently were around setting up the project and recruiting the required additional staff, but the outcome is to provide the full range of placements for children needing short term foster placement or permanent or families.

Resolved:

- 1) to note the good work being done on the FPS Gold Project; and
- 2) to add a follow up report on the FPS Gold Project to the Work Programme.

56. The Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children and Young People

James Priestman, Head of Drugs and Community Safety, introduced the report providing information for the Panel on the levels of domestic abuse in Slough and its impact on children, which is estimated to cost public services in Slough up to £11m a year.

Members discussed why the levels of domestic abuse were higher in Slough when compared with the rest of the Thames Valley area, and Officers stressed that there was no single answer to this. There had been a lot of work done to encourage the reporting of incidents, by both men and women.

The Panel considered the impact that domestic abuse had on children, and the work being done around early intervention and prevention, where work with the whole family was aimed at keeping the family unit together. Members noted, in particular, the role played by Children's Centres in early identification of family problems and provision of advice and support, along with helping victims to understand the potential impact on children.

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Resolved:

- 1) to add a report on interventions to the ECS Scrutiny work programme; and
- 2) that a breakdown of the statistics for female and male victims of domestic abuse be circulated to the Panel.

57. Adult Learning Service

Andrew Stevens, Assistant Director Culture and Skills, and Philip Wright, Head of Lifelong Learning, introduced the report to the Panel seeking comment on the annual self assessment review of adult learning and the proposals, to be considered by Cabinet, to develop a shared adult learning services with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The draft Cabinet report was circulated to the Panel.

The Panel discussed whether the results of the self assessment were in line with comments made by Ofsted, and were informed that it showed that Slough was continuing to maintain areas of strength and that work is taking place to address any areas of concern. Slough was looking to adapt its marketing to meet local demands, and cultivate opportunities at all levels of education.

Members noted that the quality of adult community learning was improving, and Slough has some areas with outstanding features, that had been highlighted through Ofsted's good practice website. Members also noted that Slough's good reputation in this area was seen in RBWM's agreement to integrate the two services. There would be financial benefits to the integration, but in doing this Slough would be taking on some responsibility to bring the RBWM service up to the same standard as Slough's.

Resolved – that Members would forward any comments regarding the draft Cabinet report for the Scrutiny Officer by the 1 February 2012.

58. Teenage Health

Sian Smith, Children and Young People's Health Improvement Manager, introduced the report to the Panel, highlighting the work that had been done to reduce the gap between most and least healthy young people in Slough, to improve young people's self esteem, to tackle pregnancy and termination rates, to target levels of sexually transmitted diseases such as Chlamydia, and levels of alcohol and drug use.

Members discussed the difficulties of tackling a number of these areas and in particular the window of opportunity to treat drug problems and the need to improve sexual health education.

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Resolved – that the report be noted.

59. Elective Home Education

Tony Browne, Head of School Services, introduced the report to the Panel describing the responsibilities of the local authority in relation to elective education.

The authority's role was confirmed as an annual visit from the education officer, with the consent of the parents. Members expressed some concern about the limitations of this in monitoring the quality of education for children educated at home.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

60. Forward Work Programme

The Chair invited Sarah Forsyth, Scrutiny Officer, to introduce the report. Members raised their concerns that agendas were too long at present and the need to allow time for more in depth scrutiny work in the future.

Resolved:

- 1) that a progress report on the Family Placement Service Gold Project be added to the work programme;
- 2) that a report on domestic violence interventions be added to the work programme; and
- 3) that consideration be given to a joint meeting with the Health Scrutiny Panel to look at the work being done, and impact of, Priority 3 of the Children and Young People's Plan.

61. Attendance Record

Resolved – that the attendance record be noted.

62. Dates of Next Meetings

20 February 2012 – Extraordinary meeting of the Panel to discuss Child Trafficking and Exploitation
22 March 2012

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.30 pm)