

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 24th November, 2011.

Present:- Councillors O'Connor (Chair), Abe (Vice-Chair), Dar, Davis, P K Mann, Minhas, Sharif, Smith and Strutton

Apolgoies:- None received

Absent:- Councillor S. Wright

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Pantelic and Strutton

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Charlie McGeachie, Head Teacher Representative

Absent:- Councillor McKeown (Education Voting Co-opted Member)

PART 1

38. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

39. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th October, 2011

The minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on 12th October were approved as a correct record.

Minute 28 The Chair asked about correspondence with the Schools Adjudicator on the expansion of Claycots Primary School at the Town Hall. Clair Pyper said the Council had replied to the Adjudicator's enquiries, and copies will be sent to Panel Members.

Minute 29 The Chair said she had decided not to go ahead with the recommendation to Cabinet as there is no hard data on neighbouring authorities placing challenging families in Slough. Clair Pyper suggested the situation Slough and some other authorities face is the result of national policy, and any lobbying should be directed to central government.

Minute 32 The Panel noted that Members also have a role in addressing attainment issues amongst pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds through their work with constituents. The Chair reminded officers the Panel had not received the gender breakdown officers had promised at the last meeting.

40. Member Questions

None had been received.

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41. Munro Report on Safeguarding – presentation from Clair Pyper, Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services

The Chair invited Clair Pyper, Strategic Director for Education and Children's Services, and David Jennings, Service Manager, to give a presentation on Professor Eileen Munro's report – copy of slides attached. Among Professor Munro's recommendations are

- More child focus & greater attention to the voice of the child
- More local judgement and less reliance on tick boxes & central prescription
- Much higher priority for, and improved quality of, risk assessment
- Raising the skill- and, in particular, experience-levels of front-line social workers.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made

- a. Slough Borough Council employs about 65 staff in front line practice management roles.
- b. Munro will mean senior & more experienced staff dealing with the most difficult cases at an earlier stage.
- c. The Social Work profession needs to be stronger, including its regulatory bodies.
- d. The Council cannot deliver the Munro agenda on its own. The Council's partner organisations also need to be fully involved and signed up for improvement to happen.
- e. The impact on costs will depend on how well the changes work. If children in the greatest need receive intensive intervention earlier, the long-term financial effect may be that fewer children reach high levels of need. A key challenge will be to ensure better resource targeting.
- f. Members' role in safeguarding needs further definition and awareness e.g. through the Member Development Programme.

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank Clair Pyper and David Jennings for the clarity of their presentation.
- (2) To ask that the Member Development Programme include a session on Members' Role in Child Protection.

42. Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children - Clair Pyper, Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services

The Chair invited Clair Pyper, Strategic Director for Education and Children Services, to introduce the report. She explained that the report did not refer to the Minister's response to the Safeguarding Improvement Plan which had been received on 23rd November, the day before the Panel meeting.

In response to Members' questions the following comments were made

- a. The Council's Performance Indicators show only 60% of core assessments were completed in 2011 within the recommended 35

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days, compared with the 80% target. The indicators do not show the quality of the assessments.

- b. The Council will be recruiting more permanent staff to reduce reliance on agency staff, a key weakness Ofsted had identified in their inspection. Lower staff turnover will also help in implementing the Improvement Plan.
- c. Most local schools have a good understanding of Child Protection issues, and local police make a positive contribution to the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The new Board Chair, Paul Burnett, is working with the Council to improve NHS involvement.
- d. Slough has its own integrated child record ICS system for tracking cases within the borough, but for children who come from outside Slough it relies on information from other authorities to find information. The new Government had abandoned the national 'Contact Point' system introduced by the last Government which was meant to act as a national system for tracking children.
- e. The fall in referrals to statutory social care can be seen as a positive sign early intervention is working better.

Councillor Natasa Pantelic, Commissioner for Education and Children, said she would ask for the Minister's letter to be sent to Panel Members.

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank Clair Pyper for her report and update and to ask her to convey to Children's Services social workers the Panel's appreciation for their hard work and dedication in achieving positive outcomes for the children with whom they work.
- (2) To commend the effectiveness of the Communications Plan in improving staff involvement and support for the changes needed.
- (3) To ask the Chair to consider the need for an additional report when Members have read the Improvement Plan and the Minister's letter.

43. Ofsted Annual Children's Services Assessment 2010 - Clair Pyper, Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services

The Chair invited Clair Pyper, Strategic Director for Education and Children Services, Robin Crofts, Assistant Director for Inclusion and Margaret Dennison, Interim Assistant Director Children and Families, to introduce the report. Among key points they made were

- Recent Express coverage had been mistaken. This report is about Ofsted's routine annual assessment of the authority as a whole, not a further inspection, and it covers other areas of performance including schools.
- Safeguarding had been rated as poor and brought the Council's overall rating down from 'good' to 'poor'. Other services, including Education, continue to progress.

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- The number of schools in special measures had reduced from six to four, and progress in the remainder had been judged as 'satisfactory'.
- Local GCSE results were now placed ninth nationally, up from 13th previously. Exclusions were amongst the lowest in the country. Mallards residential home had recently been inspected as 'good with outstanding features'.

In response to Members' questions the following comments were made

- a. The Council wants to work with local academy schools to ensure comprehensive education services continue to be provided and to make it as easy as possible for parents to choose schools.
- b. The Youth Offending Team had met the Action Plan targets.

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank Clair Pyper and her team for their responses.
- (2) To send questions on the Youth Offending Team to Clair Pyper so they can come back to the next Panel meeting.

44. School Places – Robin Crofts, Assistant Director, Inclusion

The Chair invited Robin Crofts, Assistant Director for Inclusion, to introduce the report. Slough's school-age population continues to grow rapidly

- Fifteen additional forms of entry have been provided since 2008 with another four due to start in 2012
- It is expected three new secondary schools will be needed
- Only 46% of Slough children succeed in going to their first choice of secondary school, low by national standards.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made

- a. It is possible 'all-through' schools will be needed with Primary and Secondary education provided on one site.
- b. The continued existence of the 11+ in some Slough schools and the large number of out-of-borough students attending them complicate school place planning.
- c. The Council is confident all Slough children will be offered places.

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank Robin Crofts for his report and responses.
- (2) To ask the Chair to agree the timing of a future update.

45. Performance Update - oral report from Clair Pyper, Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services

The Chair invited Clair Pyper, Strategic Director for Education and Children Services, to give a short oral update:-

- a. Validated exam results will be ready for the Panel's next meeting.

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- b. The rate of adoptions in the borough had improved from a low base.

Resolved – To note Clair Pyper's update.

46. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/for information

No reports were received.

47. Forward Work Programme

The Chair invited Guy Fiegehen, Interim Scrutiny Officer, to introduce the report.

Resolved:-

- (1) To note the possible additional items already identified in this meeting on the Minister's response to the Safeguarding Action Plan, Youth Offending Team, School Places and Validated Exam Results.
- (2) To ask the Chair to review all the suggested items for the rest of the year with the Scrutiny Officer to ensure manageable agendas for each meeting.

48. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the attendance record be noted.

49. Date of Next Meeting- 24th January, 2012

Tuesday, 24th January 2012.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.00 pm)