

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 9th June, 2011.

Present:- Councillors Abe, Dar, Davis, Minhas, O'Connor, Sharif and Smith.

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Plimmer and Haines

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Mr McGeachie

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Mann

PART 1

1. Election of Chair

The nomination of Councillor O'Connor was moved and seconded. There being no other nominations, it was –

Resolved – That Councillor O'Connor be appointed Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel for the 2011/12 municipal year.

(Councillor O'Connor in the Chair)

2. Opening of meeting

Councillor Patricia O'Connor opened the meeting and set out the principles around how the Panel would work over the next twelve months.

Members were encouraged to fully participate. Members were also strongly encouraged to familiarise themselves with the service area being scrutinised including visiting children's centres to develop their understanding of the context within which the service operates in

The Panel would attempt to have more of the meetings take place out in the community.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

The nomination of Councillor Abe was moved and seconded. There being no other nominations, it was –

Resolved – That Councillor Abe be appointed Vice Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel for the 2011/12 municipal year.

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4. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

5. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th March 2011

At the last meeting of the Panel it was agreed that a copy of the draft Children and Young Peoples Plan would be circulated to the Panel and Members advised that this had not yet been received. The Director of Education confirmed that the Plan was still being developed and would encapsulate the findings of the recent Ofsted report and the work undertaken to address concerns raised. Members would be invited to comment on the final version before formal publication.

The minutes of the last meeting held on 9th March 2011 were approved as a correct record.

6. Member Questions

No questions had been received.

7. Order of business

With the agreement of the panel the agenda order was varied so that the item on the Ofsted Report Inspection be taken first.

8. OFSTED Report on the Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children

The Panel considered a report on the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection and the Council's response and remedial action. The Panel noted the challenges that Slough faced, the current service pressures and the nature of the Ofsted regime. The Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services, provided a detailed explanation of the findings but stressed the importance of viewing these objectively and separate from the associated media coverage. The Panel noted the positive practice highlighted by inspectors and the key areas of improvement that were now being addressed through both the improvement plan, and over the longer term, the recovery plan. The Director stressed that despite the findings and concerns raised by inspectors – it was important to state and clarify that no child was at risk of significant physical harm. Of the five cases identified as being of concern, the main focus of attention was the potential harm caused to children through their exposure to domestic violence in the household. Of these five, only one case involved emergency intervention with the remaining four either having had necessary action already or where children were deemed to be sufficiently well protected.

The focus now for the service was to address the concerns raised. Improvements that were already in motion included:

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- An Audit of all case files of children under 5 on child protection plans
- An Audit of potentially high risk cases
- Checks to make sure management oversight and quality assurance mechanisms are in place
- Recruitment of additional experienced staff at managerial level to oversee service and drive improvements
- Further work with partners including specifically the Police to ensure full cooperation and involvement in handling and dealing with domestic abuse cases.

The Panel raised a number of concerns including:

- The proportion of cases that threw up concerns against the total number of cases reviewed and queried the systems the council had in place to ensure that children were being protected beyond the five cases that had been identified.
- The usefulness of the distinctions between levels of harm children experienced. Queries were raised as to the work the council was undertaking to protect children from issues beyond domestic abuse.
- The distinction between the nature of the Ofsted inspections and in particular the difference between the announced and un-announced inspections
- The Panel sought clarity on the filing and administrative system used at Slough and its suitability in logging and monitoring case work.
- A member in attendance under rule 30 asked a question on the resources being allocated to support the improvement plan.
- The possibility of the Council performing a 'local' inspection modelled on the Ofsted approach
- Regarding the issue of staff turnover, Members sought clarity on what the issues were and how well Slough was able to retain its staff.

The Interim Assistant Director for Children and Families confirmed that case audits were now being performed against all case files that were or could be of concern. To date no files audited warranted any further action. The Council was undertaking a range of measures to improve and manage child safety and it was important to recognise that the issue was one of risk mitigation. The Officer also confirmed that whilst the eighty one cases that had thus far been audited threw up no additional concerns, it did not mean that issues would not be found but there was a through process of audit and provision in place should further intervention be warranted. It was noted that additional staff had been brought in to aid this process including two experienced auditors whilst further work was looking at multi-agency involvement.

The Director confirmed the status of the Ofsted inspection as the formal announced inspection. Occurring every three years, this was a much more thorough process focused on a range of issues from case auditing to effectiveness of partnership work. An unannounced inspection took place in 2010 but at that point no issues had been identified as being of concern. The Service was expecting the next unannounced inspection to take place in Autumn 2011.

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The Multi Agency Locality Team manager confirmed that the administrative system used at Slough was amongst the most effective currently used in Local Authorities.

The Director confirmed that resources had been allocated to deliver both the improvement and the recovery plan. Some of the resources are drawn from base budget but the service was also looking at additional resources through the use of the early Intervention Grant. The Chief Executive noted the importance of the response from the Department for Education (DFE). Support from the latter was based on severity of issues faced. The fact that no support was being offered from DFE, confirmed the fact that the inspection outcome, whilst concerning, was not as severe as was being presented. In addition to the resources being invested by Slough, some of which are one off costs, the DFE will make available a Peer Support team to offer challenge and help guide improvements. Also important to note that the response from the DFE has been supportive of the actions being taken by the council.

The Chief Executive confirmed that whilst it was possible for the Council to undertake a local inspection mirroring the process employed by Ofsted, the focus was on securing improvements rather than directing resources towards further inspections.

The Director confirmed that latest staff turn-over rates were approximately 15% which was not particularly high. Issues the council did face was staff leaving for London – an issue faced by the council generally and not a particular problem for the service itself.

The Commissioner for Education stated that whilst the results had been disappointing, there was very clear commitment from the service and all the staff to address the issues identified. Much of the work in the improvement plan was being delivered whilst resources had been made available to ensure the longer-term recovery plan would also be implemented.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Chair was invited to comment. The Chair confirmed that the audit also made recommendations to the LSCB. These included the view that the LSCB was underdeveloped and needed to assume more of a challenging role. The Chair confirmed that the LSCB was looking at developing a more effective scrutiny role and supporting the Service in the auditing of work, further advancing multi-agency work and addressing the wider management and leadership issues.

Concluding the item, the Chair of the Panel recommended that the September meeting would look at the underlying issues that could contribute to challenging households including domestic violence and how these were being addressed through partnership working.

Officers were also invited to report back to the Panel in September on the progress being made in the implementation of the Recovery Plan.

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Resolved-

- (a) That the Panel endorse the draft recovery plan.
- (b) That a further report be brought to the September meeting setting out progress against the Recovery Plan and that the report include a commentary on how Slough is looking at addressing underlying issues (in isolation or in partnership) including work on domestic violence

9. **School Improvement and Raising Standards, Including Schools in Special Measures, with Particular Reference to Vulnerable Groups**

The Assistant Director, Inclusion introduced a report on School Improvement and Raising Standards. A number of senior officers from the Service were introduced to the Panel.

The report provided information on the range of work undertaken by the service to support schools in addressing improvement issues. It also provided particular detail on the achievement and progress of vulnerable groups and the work being delivered to secure rapid and sustained progress in educational outcomes.

The Panel received updates from Officers representing different functions across the service including SureStart, Early Years, Services to Schools and Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.

The Panel noted the particular importance of early year's work, of SureStart and the work the council was doing to improve the quality of childminders with the focus being on moving more childminders from the category of satisfactory to that of good. The Head of School Services updated the Panel on key work programmes currently being delivered. This included work on improving attendance and governance, both of which were crucial in improving both the functioning of a school and attainment levels of pupils. The focus for the function was to implement and roll out a comprehensive governance support plan. Finally the Head of Services for Children with Learning Difficulties set out the work being delivered to improve attainment levels for children with SEN. The range of interventions had meant that attainment at Key Stage 4 for children with SEN was above the national average. However because general attainment levels had also improved, it meant that the gap between the two groups was also above the national average.

The Panel raised a number of questions including:

- The issue of non-attendance, how much of a problem it was for the borough and the approach the council was taking to address this.
- The reasons behind the success at Hounslow, and whether Slough could borrow any learning.

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- How schools support children with dyslexia and in particular children from minority backgrounds.
- Whether a correlation existed between the percentage of schools deemed inadequate and the percentage of pupils with English as an additional language or special educational needs
- The work Slough was doing to engage parents who may have had difficulties in actively participating and taking an interest in their children's education.

The Head of Services to Schools confirmed that non attendance had been an issue for some schools but that the council, working closely with schools had instituted a range of measures that had led to improvements. This included the issuing of notices and greater work with parents, who once engaged, did lead to substantial improvements in attendance levels. The Headteacher representative confirmed the criticality of attendance for the school and its designation as a 'limiting factor'. Due to this, schools placed particular emphasis on monitoring and tracking attendance and then working with parents as early as possible if issues were identified. The Assistance Director for Education reiterated the point that the non attendance was not an endemic issue and schools were working well, alone and in collaboration with the LEA and other schools to address any challenges.

The Assistant Director confirmed that since the loss of funding and the knock on effect on the disbanding of the Raising Achievement Team, the Council had to be more focused on how resources were used and how strategies were employed to address ongoing concerns. There had been a move to a re-configuration of support available. Part of this included provision to commission support from external consultants responsible for some of the improvements made in Hounslow.

Responding to the question on identifying dyslexia, the Officers confirmed that the lead fell to the schools who through, staff working on inclusion, took the lead in identifying, supporting and then tracking progress of children. The Headteacher representative set out the importance of ICT in this process. It was also confirmed that provisions were in place to identify and support minority children with dyslexia.

The Assistant Director for Inclusion confirmed that the LEAs own research has shown that the tripartite issues of quality of management, gathering and use of management information and the issues of attendance and governance played a much bigger role in determining the success of a school rather than the profile of the pupil intake. The head teacher representative concurred adding that a further issue was the quality of assessments being used. For instance the paper chosen this year for Slough schools had a reading age of 14 and included material that was difficult for children not only to relate to, but potentially insensitive for children that had arrived from more difficult circumstances.

Finally Officers confirmed that work was ongoing to support parents engage better in their child's schooling. Resources would be drawn from the Early

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Intervention Grant to drive this work forward. The Headteacher Representative added that often schools needed to be more creative in how parents were engaged including work to raise confidence.

It was agreed that the -

Headteacher Representative send a copy of the test to the Commissioner for Education and Children.

Resolved: -

- (a) The Panel endorsed the School Improvement Strategy
- (b) The Panel requested that a further paper be brought to the September meeting with a focus on the work being done to support early years
- (c) The Panel recommended a follow up session to look at the impact of Aspire.

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

No reports were received.

11. Forward Work Programme

The following item was added to the forward work programme-

- 5th September 2011 - Ofsted Inspection and Recovery Plan (to include a commentary on how Slough is looking at addressing underlying issues (in isolation or in partnership) including work on domestic violence

Resolved – That the Forward Work programme be noted.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as 5th September 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 7.07 pm and closed at 9.45 pm)