

## **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 12th October, 2011.**

**Present:-** Councillors O'Connor (Chair), Abe (Vice-Chair), Dar, Minhas, Sharif and Smith

**Apologies:-** Councillors Davis and P K Mann

**Absent:-** Councillor S. Wright

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Grewal, Pantelic and Strutton

### **Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members**

Charlie McGeachie, Head Teacher Representative

## **PART 1**

### **26. Declaration of Interest**

None were received.

### **27. Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th September 2011**

The minutes of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on 5<sup>th</sup> September were approved as a correct record.

Councillor O'Connor wished to express her thanks to Cllr P K Mann for covering her absence at the previous meeting and Chairing the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September.

### **28. Member Questions**

One question was submitted relating to the planned opening of the Claycots school at the old Town Hall site in September 2012. Robin Crofts, Assistant Director for Inclusion confirmed that the current timetable was still on track. Discussions were being held with relevant partners on a range of matters including the issue of proposed catchment area. Once these issues have been considered by the adjudicator in November, further information will be made available to the Panel.

**Resolved-** That once available, the draft submission be forwarded to all Panel Members.

### **29. Reducing Family Poverty in Slough**

Val Goodwin, Head of Slough Surestart Service provided an update on the work carried out by the council in addressing family poverty in Slough

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A number of Member questions followed. A question was asked relating to the status of the Early Intervention Grant and whether this will remain in place for the future. Questions were also asked about the efficacy of using Free School Meals (FSM) as a measure for attracting the Pupil Premium, the proactive work officers were doing to identify families at risk of poverty and the continuing challenge posed by neighbouring authorities 'exporting' challenging families to Slough.

It was confirmed that the Early Intervention Grant was not a new pot of money, but rather the sum of previous amalgamated grants being brought together in one pot and itself a reduction of approximately one million pounds. The Pupil Premium was however 'new' money and totalled approximately £430 per pupil. The problem however remained the use of free school meal recipients as a measure of determining pupil premium allocation. For a number of reasons the FSM measurement did not suit Slough as take-up was lower than hoped and lobbying to have this amended may need to be considered. Work to identify families at risk of poverty was also ongoing. There were good relationships with partner agencies notably Health and Job Centre Plus who were both referring cases deemed significant. There was also a team of family outreach workers who would follow up each referral as well as make contact with individual families. Finally, officers confirmed that there were some concerns regarding the arrival of vulnerable and challenging families into Slough – families that were being placed in the town by neighbouring authorities. The Chair noted that this issue had been raised at a number of recent meetings and that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel should make a formal recommendation to Cabinet seeking action to address this issue.

**Resolved-** That the Chair of the Panel make a formal recommendation to Cabinet seeking a more robust approach to neighbouring authorities placing challenging families into Slough, including the legal base.

### **30. Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children-Progress Report**

Clair Pyper, Director for Education and Children Services presented the paper on the Ofsted Inspection and the work that had been carried out over the preceding month to further address the recommendations made. The Director confirmed that the formal Improvement Notice had been received. Further whilst an attempt had been made, the post of Chair of the LSCB was yet to be filled. Interim arrangements were being looked at to cover any gap. Concurring with comments already expressed, the Commissioner for Education, Cllr Pantelic also stressed both the importance of ensuring that improvements made were sustainable whilst also committing to ensure that regular correspondence with Members would be maintained. Cllr Pantelic confirmed that as the designated Member representative on the LSCB, she was happy to take all Member concerns back to the Board and then feedback responses directly to Members.

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The item was then opened up for Member questions. Questions were submitted on a variety of topics including whether any central government support was available in terms of recruiting a LSCB Chair, the nature of sector-led support, how the Chair of the Improvement Board was selected, possible amendments needed to future scrutiny arrangements and whether the Council had the necessary resources in place to deliver the range of improvements needed. Further questions were raised under Rule 30 including the timetable to deliver improvements and a request for regular updates on the number of contacts, cases and referrals being received by the department.

The Director for Education confirmed that there were strict guidelines in place in terms of recruiting a Chair. The avenues that were available had been tried and in fact it was through such routes that the interim choice had been selected. Sector-Led support was a new process whereby improvement support was made available through existing professionals who were working or had previous experience in the field. The Officer confirmed that considerable investment had taken place to address the recommendations and resources were available to cover the next 18 months. However it was important to note that this was not all about money. The Director confirmed that there were Department of Education guidelines in place stipulating who could Chair. One important consideration was previous experience. Finally responding to the question about future scrutiny arrangements, it was confirmed that existing arrangements were adequate, however given the broad nature of the work being considered, it may be necessary to set up some task and Finish Groups focused on particular aspects of the work. The Officer confirmed that improvements will need to be made within the next 18 months. It was also confirmed that regular updates on the number of cases/contacts or referrals would be provided as requested.

### **Resolved-**

- (a) that a further update on progress be brought to the next panel
- (b) that an item on performance also be brought to the next panel

## **31. Children with Special Education Needs**

Jackie Wright, Head of Service for Children with Learning Disabilities, presented a paper on Special Educational Needs in Slough.

A number of questions were asked in the discussion. This included how children were assessed as having Special Educational Needs, whether Ofsted judgements take into account the positive work carried out by the function and what support is offered to pupils with dyslexia.

The officer confirmed that there was a stringent system in place measuring children's assessments. This system was used to determine the level of support a child would need. Important to note that the service responds to the actual condition exhibited by the child so services are tailored to meet needs. Regarding the Ofsted judgement, the inspectors do take a balanced view so

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will assess the positive work carried out by the service alongside performance in other key areas. However what isn't taken into account is the issue of poverty or the changing demographics in Slough both of which could play an important part. In terms of support offered to pupils with dyslexia, training is provided to all schools whilst a specialist resource of trained teachers is available for additional support.

Members raised the issue of how the council monitors and assists children with special educational needs in the transition between childhood and adulthood. Officers confirmed that this was a closely managed progress with lots of tracking. However, this issue was more complex and would warrant a fuller discussion as a dedicated agenda item.

**Resolved-** That an item on SEN and the transition between childhood and adulthood be added to a forthcoming agenda.

### **32. Report on Attainment of Pupils from Ethnic Minorities**

Robin Crofts, Assistant Director for Inclusion, presented a paper on the work carried out by the council to address attainment issues amongst pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds.

A number of comments and questions followed. Members emphasised that a range of factors needed to be cited in helping understand performance amongst key groups in Slough. This included both attitudes of pupils themselves, the support offered by families and the particular support structures in place within individual schools. The importance of data was emphasised both in terms of its collection but also how it is used to tailor the support provided to pupils. Attendance is also of crucial importance and something that schools are working hard to improve on a constant basis. It does however remain the case that parents continue to request holidays for children during term time which can have a detrimental impact on the child's schooling.

Members queries whether figures provided would be broken down by gender. Officers confirmed this was possible and the relevant data would be provided outside the meeting.

**Resolved-** That figures on gender breakdown by made available to panel members outside the meeting.

### **33. Statement of Purpose for Breakaway, Respite Care Unit**

Sue Betts, Manager of Services for Children with Learning Disabilities presented a paper on the Breakaway Respite Care service offered by the council. The Ofsted judgement recognised the service provided as good with the only issue identified being management and leadership which was deemed satisfactory. The service had regularly garnered positive feedback from service users and was recognised as a valued service amongst local people. For this reason, in each budgetary cycle, the level of funding directed

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to the service has always been protected. Members were encouraged to attend the service to see the excellent work carried out.

The panel noted the excellent contribution made by the service.

### **34. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/for information**

No reports were received.

### **35. Forward Work Programme**

Members asked for additional papers to be brought to forthcoming panels including

- A follow up paper on the Ofsted report progress (November 2011)
- A paper on performance management for the next panel (November 2011)
- A paper on SEN and the transition between childhood and adulthood

### **36. Attendance Record**

**Resolved** – That the attendance record be noted.

### **37. Date of Next Meeting- 24th November, 2011**

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.25 pm)

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