

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 28th January, 2008.

Present:- Councillors Maclsaac (Vice-Chair), Dhillon, Jenkins, Mann, O'Connor and Pabbi

Members Present Under Rule 30: Coucillors Aziz and Shine

Education Voting Co-opted Members

Roy Davey, Oxford Diocese

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Sandy Hopkinson, Primary School Representative

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Finn

PART 1

35. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

36. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 29th November, 2007 were agreed as a correct record.

37. Order of Business

It was agreed that agenda item 5, Member Call-In – Ethnicity of Grammar School Pupils would be taken as the first item.

38. Member Call-in - Ethnicity of Grammar School Pupils

The Panel considered the details of a Member call-in submitted by Councillor Shine. The wording of the call in was as follows: To scrutinise the reasons for the ethnic imbalance of students at the grammar schools in Slough and to consider how this imbalance may be redressed. He noted that the question was really intended to have focussed on the causes of the economic situation regarding skills shortage in Slough. There was approximately a ratio of three Asian pupils to one white pupil in Slough grammar schools. It was reiterated that the call-in was not made with an intention to restrict entry to grammar schools to Asian pupils but to find out the reasons why white pupils were not fairly represented.

The Member informed the Forum that it was recognised that the most under-performing group was white working class males. He questioned the reasons why they under-performed and why they were under-represented in Slough grammar

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 28.01.08

schools. It did not appear that this group was being monitored by the local authority. Slough was in the top 10% in the country for earnings but Slough residents' skills levels were among the worst in the country and most Slough residents worked outside of the Borough. Unemployment was also higher than other areas in the country especially other surrounding Boroughs. It was recognised that in the catchment area for the grammar schools there was probably a ratio of three white pupils to one Asian pupil. The Member felt that the results from the grammar schools showed that Slough appeared to be doing well but there was a vast disparity in the number of Asian to white pupils in Slough grammar schools.

Members of the Panel felt that many of the above issues were not pertinent to the original purpose of the call-in and therefore only the original issue could be dealt with at this time. An Officer noted that the grammar schools based their intake of pupils purely on the published selection. 30% to 35% of the pupils came from outside of the Borough but distance was only used as criteria for entry to the school when more children than places available achieved the pass mark. Officers noted that arrangements were open for young people from surrounding authorities to apply to Slough Grammar Schools but that the figures also varied according to the different schools. Slough was making significant progress with all children, both in grammar and comprehensive schools which meant that the GCSE results ranked eleventh in the country.

The local authority had identified areas of under-achievement and were addressing these. A significant amount of work was being carried out on narrowing the attainment gap. A Member noted that, from speaking with residents, it was largely due to the parents and their views on education as to whether their children went to grammar school. It would be interesting to observe an ethnic breakdown of those children taking the entrance exam. Another Member agreed that it was difficult to make an accurate assessment of the report without population figures and also noted that the additional issue regarding skills was an entirely separate issue. It was felt that the area of greatest concern was the low representation of the black and African population. Members wanted to know what methods were being used to raise standards in Slough.

The Chair noted that there were many other elements involved with this issue and in order for the Officers to respond to these appropriately it would be necessary for a further report to be presented at a future meeting. The issues that should be included in the future report were:-

1. The perception that grammar schools take people from outside of the area.
2. Looking at the trends and methods that are used to improve results in particular groups.
3. Breakdown of the population in Slough and those taking the entrance exam.
4. The number of those from inside the Borough going to schools out of the Borough and those outside, coming in.

A Co-opted Member noted that key stage 2 was not targeted towards passing the 11 plus and many parents chose to coach their children for it but those from less affluent backgrounds were generally not able to. The Member suggested that to address this there may need to be some form of compensatory education. An

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 28.01.08

Officer noted that education standards in Slough have increased dramatically over the past ten years and the numbers going into higher education were at a good level although it was acknowledged that more needed to be achieved as an authority.

Resolved - That a report be brought to a future meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel that addressed the requests for further information regarding the original purpose of the call-in.

39. Berkshire East PCT - Mental Health Needs for Young People - Presentation

Robin Crofts reminded the Panel that at the previous meeting on the 29th November there was a report on Children and Adolescents mental health needs and Members requested that the PCT be invited to the next meeting to deliver further information regarding this. Trevor Keeble and Pamela Herring from Berkshire East PCT were present at the meeting, along with Sally Grimstone, the Chair of the CAMHS Board to provide further information.

Trevor Keeble informed the Panel that there was currently a re-commissioning of the service underway. A major realignment was taking place and all Officers involved were working hard to create a consistent service specification. A commissioning group had been established and had produced a paper on this issue. He highlighted a number of issues from the paper including:

- A greater number of referrals at level two to level three and that the 5 – 15 age were receiving more referrals than average
- The number of referrals for BME groups was broadly average. However this meant that there were fewer from Slough than expected.
- The number of those missing appointments was not higher in Slough than elsewhere and was not dependent upon where the person lived or the level of deprivation, for example the highest rate was in Foxborough and Langley St Mary.
- Half the number of ADHD referrals were received compared to those in other areas and they receive less self-harm referrals than other areas.
- There were less referrals for Looked After Children. This was in part due to a recent fall, in response to good services that had been developed. However there were many referrals from areas that were not expected.
- Referrals that were received covered every aspect of mental health.
- It was the intention of the PCT to create a unified service for mental health. Some services would move into tier three provided by health and others could be provided by the local authority at tier two. Officers would examine the relationship between tier two and tier three services.

Members raised a number of points including:-

- A Member queried the areas of the majority of missed appointments. Officers noted that generally those from the most deprived areas do not turn up for various reasons, for example, not able to read letters, did not want the stigma or felt that the problem had passed. There was a national rate of 35% of people missing appointments. The PCT was working on the reasons for this and was considering sending texts to remind people of their appointments.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 28.01.08

- Members noted that Slough was a multicultural area and enquired if there were any problems more prevalent here than elsewhere because of this. Officers responded that there was nothing significant but that there was an Officer in place whose responsibility it was to work with ethnic communities.
- A Member questioned what had done to discover the reasons why there were statistically less referrals for ADHD and self-harm in Slough. Officers responded that there would be a formal meeting the following week to identify these as formal concerns as the report was not yet out. Officers would decide what needed to be addressed initially and it was noted that there was some surprise at these results. Officers noted that part of the explanation could be that schools had developed skills and expertise in this area, this was reflected in the number of permanent exclusions. It was noted that GPs had become better at recognising these issues. GP champions would become part of the group. A large support service meant that a number of people had not reached level three as their needs were already being addressed.
- A Member questioned whether there were sufficient beds at the residential care unit. Officers responded that the main in-patient unit in Berkshire Adolescent Unit had sufficient beds to deal with all children that needed them but ideally children should remain in their homes. Removing a child from their home was a last resort. Ideally more intensive in-community support would be provided. If there was a clinical need for a child to receive in-patient care the cost for this was always met. It was noted that there was a total of 36 children in specialist placement across Berkshire East.
- Members questioned if the perception that many young people have more pressures than previously was true and asked if this lead to more complicated problems, for example with drugs and alcohol. Officers confirmed that drugs and alcohol were more significant now than a number of years ago. A recent children's survey on alcohol and drugs noted that they were at lower levels in Slough than other authorities. However, young people had requested more information and guidance on these issues and Officers were looking to improve this. Bullying and peer pressure were major concerns. The needs analysis for this meant that these children were not dealt with at tier three but through health and wellbeing programmes in schools and parenting groups. It was felt that children were not going under the radar but were being detected and dealt with early.

Resolved - That the presentation be noted.

40. Mallards Statement of Purpose

Nicky Rayner presented the report to the Forum detailing the statement of purpose for the six bed residential children's home and the aims and achievements of the home. Members noted that it was an excellent report and congratulated the Officers on this. Members also requested that a visit to the children's home be arranged for those members who wished to attend. A Member queried whether the children in the unit came from Slough or elsewhere. The Officers responded that the resource reflected the diverse community of Slough and was designed to

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 28.01.08

be as reflective of a family situation as possible. It was noted that it was sometimes inappropriate for parents to visit children but there was a policy of placing children as close to Slough as it was appropriate for them to be.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

41. Impact of Immigration on Education and Children's Services

The Panel noted the contents of the report that was presented by Annal Nayyar. The Officer noted that there was volatility and change throughout the year but the financial impact of 140 more children across the borough was extremely minor. Provision for this was currently set into the budget and was an issue that occurred nationally. The increased number of children equated to £35,000 in funding which was against a broad budget of approximately £1m.

Members thanked the Officers for the precise information included in the report but questioned how the categories of country of origin were reached. It was noted that this information was taken from respondents own classifications. The figures would be revised in January, 2008 from the January census. These would then be reviewed between February and May. These would then be reported to the Government to determine the amount of Direct Schools Grant received. Members noted that Slough received greater funding than its geographical neighbours. This was due to the money allocated by the formula for deprivation.

With regard to the youth service it was noted that a new management information system would help the collating of management data. The number using the youth service were currently known but those using the youth service in different areas could not be determined. Officers aimed to achieve the Government target of attracting 15% of young people to the youth service but young people would also make use of other activities such as organised sports.

Members asked if there were hidden costs not included in the report such as the assessment centre for English as a foreign language. Officers noted that these costs were transparent and included in the figures. Other costs that may not be self-evident in the figures were relatively minor and would usually be picked up by the Schools Forum.

Members noted that the Council's Education and Youth Service was coping well with the impact of immigration and requested to know what strategies were used to deal with the number of immigrants. Officers noted that resources could be channelled to where they were needed throughout the Directorate and Members had been broadly supportive of Education and Children's services in the budget setting process. It was noted that funding followed the children as they moved on. The costing for children moving between schools was factored in as a contingency to the general budget. It was noted that the main aim was to ensure the capacity of youth services and also to integrate different groups of children into mainstream services.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 28.01.08

42. Financial Strategy 2008/09 to 2010/11

Annal Nayyar presented the reported to the Panel. He highlighted that there were initial grants that were previously prioritised separately but were now absorbed into other grants. Members were pleased to see that the music grant was still included in the budget. Officers noted that this was lead by the Head of Schools but was incorporated into all areas in the Directorate. The post of Recruitment and Retention Officer which was previously recommended to be deleted in the budget setting process was still under consideration. The Government input for the primary strategy programme was power to spend rather than a physical grant. The primary strategy was not supported by Members, therefore it was not on the reserve list. Members noted that the school lunch grant was to remain the same for the next three years. Officers commented that this would be addressed through the Direct Schools Grant by the schools.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

43. School Organisation and Planning Terms of Reference

Bill Alexander presented the report to the Members of the Panel and highlighted the fact that they were seeking representation from the Members for the School Organisation and Planning and Task and Finish Working Group. It was noted that the Commissioner for Education and Children's Services requested that there were three cross party Members appointed to the Group. The Chair noted that it was more appropriate to do this following the elections.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that Members request nominations for representation from their political groups in due course.

44. Forward Work Programme

A Member requested that the Panel receive information on parenting skills including increased access with Surestart and how far reaching this was and what services were being provided. Officers noted that they were in the later stages of developing a parenting strategy and that this would be completed around April. It was noted that this could then be brought to the June meeting. It was noted that Members of the Health Scrutiny Panel should be invited for this item.

Resolved - That the agenda items as detailed above be included in the current Forward Work Programme.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.30 pm)