



<u>Committee and Date</u> Young People's Scrutiny Committee  Thursday 14 November 2013  10:00	<u>Item No</u>  <b>3</b>  Public
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**Minutes of the Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee  
meeting held on Wednesday 17 July 2013**

10:00 – 11:52

**Responsible  
Officer**

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**Present**

Mrs J Barrow (Chairman); Mr R Evans; Dr J Jones; Mr R Macey; Mrs P Mullock (Vice Chairman); Mr K Turley; and Mr D Turner.

Co-opted Members

Mr A Atkinson Roman Catholic Diocese

Mr M Jones Parent Governor – Primary/Special Schools

**1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from the following Shropshire Council Members: Mrs H Fraser (Mr R Evans substituted); Mrs H Kidd; Mr R Tindall and Mr P Wynn.
- 1.2 Apologies were also received from the following Co-opted Members: Mr M Hignett, Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly; Rev P Wignall, Church of England Diocese; and Dr D Wilson, Parent Governor – Secondary Schools.
- 1.3 Mrs A Hartley, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, was unable to attend but Mr N Bardsley, Deputy Portfolio Holder for Children's Services was in attendance.
- 1.4 The Chairman thanked Mr Martin Jones, Parent Governor – Primary/Special Schools for his contribution over the past four years, as his period of office was coming to an end and this was his last meeting.

**2. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

- 2.1 None were disclosed.

### **3. Minutes**

3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Joint Healthy Communities and Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 20 March 2013 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3.2 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 16 May 2013 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **4. Public Question Time**

4.1 There were no public questions.

### **5. Members' Question Time**

5.1 There were no questions from Members.

### **6. Quarterly Performance Report**

6.1 Karen Bradshaw, Director of Children's Services, introduced and expanded on the report (copy attached to signed minutes), which summarised the latest measures of performance relating to social care and education for children and young people up to 31 March 2013. An amended Appendix 1 was tabled (copy attached to signed minutes).

6.2 The report identified key challenges in children's social care, which were increasing numbers of referrals and looked after children. The Director of Children's Services commented that increased numbers meant increased costs and could potentially result in a £1 million overspend in the budget and she suggested this could be an area the Committee may wish to consider.

6.3 In education, the number of children attending primary schools which were ranked by Ofsted as good or better was steadily increasing and now stood at 69%. The rate of progress for Key Stage 4 children on Free School Meals was below the statistical neighbour average, while the non-Free School Meals children were just above the average, thus creating a larger gap. Scrutiny had previously done work on "Narrowing the Gap" and the Director of Children's Services suggested this may be something to look at again.

6.4 Members commented on the change of style of the report itself, with some preferring the greater graphical representation and others finding it more difficult to understand.

6.5 In response to Members' questions and comments, a number of issues were clarified:

- Working Together 2013 identified a new single assessment form in social care: a working group led by Adam Scott, Service Manager – Case

Management, was developing this in conjunction with regional colleagues. A template had been agreed and the new form was due to be introduced later this year once all IT issues had been resolved.

- Number of foster carers: although there had been a drop in the number of foster carers, recruitment and training was on-going to address this.
- Timeliness of completing initial and core assessments: performance of 97% placed Shropshire as one of the best authorities in the country and was the result of a high focus on this area of activity over the past two years.
- Reasons for increased number of referrals: the Service Manager – Case Management suggested three core reasons, which were a clearer understanding, a more consistent approach and the Early Help agenda.
- Costs of children's placements: it was reported an average weekly cost of one placement for a looked after child could vary from £2197 to £2957; for a foster placement costs were £675 to £1352 per week; and in a children's home the approximate cost was £2800 per week.
- Head Teacher vacancies: the Director of Children's Services undertook to circulate information on the number of vacancies to Members. It was subsequently confirmed (October 2013) that there were 9 vacancies.

6.6 A Member commented that it was more important to ensure placements benefited children, rather than hitting targets about timeliness.

6.7 There was discussion about the process of how to report concerns, following an example given of a Head Teacher who had to answer questions on the telephone before being put through to a social worker to report concerns about a child. The Director of Children's Services explained that, since the Ofsted inspection at the end of 2012, the way referrals were dealt with initially had been re-configured. A dedicated team dealt with all calls, but some initial screening questions were necessary. She also informed Members that Shropshire's Safeguarding Children Board had recently established a cross-phase safeguarding group for schools where these matters could be raised and addressed.

6.8 The Chairman asked about the increased number of schools in special measures. Anne Gribbin, Principal Education Improvement Adviser, commented that this had not been expected and, as a result, the local authority was now being much more proactive in challenging head teachers and governors and calling them in to discuss and agree what actions needed to be taken.

6.9 The Chairman read out an e-mail from Dr Wilson who was unable to attend the meeting, referring to paragraph 6.15 of the report, as follows:

"I would seek assurance that the two questions suggested for consideration should include (as I'm sure is implicit) the question of how the Council will work with the growing number of academies to progress high quality education in Shropshire. I suggest that it might be appropriate for the Committee explicitly to note that the growth of academies, and the ensuing reduction in the role of the LEA, emphasises the need for the Council's officers to develop positive patterns of engagement, even if low-cost engagement, with those academies that take a similarly positive view of the

importance of such collaboration. I'm sure this is both recognised and happening, which makes it an important area for Scrutiny monitoring”.

- 6.10 In response, the Director of Children's Services agreed with the points raised and reported that the local authority had been consulting with schools over the past couple of years. Schools had been very clear that they wanted to remain part of something more than their own individual institution and that they wanted Shropshire Council to lead on designing something suitable. She concluded by saying she would be happy for this item to be included on the future Work Plan for the Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.11 The Principal Education Improvement Adviser pointed out that the rate of schools converting to academies in Shropshire was comparatively low. To date, only one primary school had become an academy. She explained she was leading on the partnership working with schools and proposals were being drafted. She added there had been a lack of clarity from central government about the grounds on which local authorities could challenge academies.
- 6.12 In response to comments about the challenges faced by teaching Heads at small primary schools, the Principal Education Improvement Adviser explained it was possible to re-organise leadership structures via federations, although this was a decision for schools and the local authority was not able to enforce this.
- 6.13 Members were pleased to learn that the situation at Sir John Talbot School, Whitchurch, had improved significantly since the local authority had served a Warning Notice and imposed an Interim Executive Board. The Vice-Chairman paid tribute to the help provided by local authority officers and the Head and Deputy Head of the Marches School, who the LA commissioned to provide Leadership support.
- 6.14 In response to a question, the Director of Children's Services confirmed there were no external academy chains in Shropshire. There was one multi-academy trust in North Shrewsbury consisting of two secondary schools, with a primary school due to join over the summer. This had been created after direct intervention by the local authority. She commented that the Secretary of State's preference was for failing schools to become academies and that in Shropshire the preference was to find a local academy solution if possible. She explained the various different types of academies, including converter academies, sponsored academies and also ones being set up by the Dioceses, relevant due to the high numbers of church schools in Shropshire.
- 6.15 There was a query about the Learning Gateway and it was clarified this was an IT platform used by schools. This was currently evolving and schools would be able to access the new Gateway according to what services they purchased. Schools made their own decisions on which services to purchase from the local authority but the Director of Children's Services felt the local authority offered good value.

6.16 Members noted the number of children achieving 5 or more A\*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics had gone down slightly in 2012. In response, the Principal Education Improvement Adviser explained the effect in Shropshire of the problem with the marking of English GCSE examinations in 2012 had been greater than elsewhere and this had caused the dip in performance. In Shropshire, a high proportion of schools used the syllabus most affected by the marking difficulties and most Shropshire students took their examinations in June, rather than any other time of the year, and both these factors had exaggerated the effects.

**6.17 RESOLVED:**

A That the key underlying and emerging issues in the performance measures be recognised.

B That the following issues be added to the Committee's Work Programme:

- Looked After Children: To scrutinise how to reduce the numbers and costs of looked after children.
- Education resources: To scrutinise what the Council does with the resources available to it to help maintain high quality education and to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- Academies: To scrutinise how the Council will work with the growing number of academies to progress high quality education in Shropshire.

**7. Developing the Future Work Programme for the Young People's Scrutiny Committee**

7.1 The Committee Officer introduced this report, (copy attached to signed minutes) which set out the changes arising from the work of the Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group. This included the change of name from Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee to Young People's Scrutiny Committee (subject to Council approval on 18 July 2013) with a consequent change of remit. Members were invited to suggest topics for inclusion on the Work Programme for the new Committee.

7.2 In answer to a query from a Member, it was clarified that the 9 October meeting of the Committee would now focus on the budget for children's services. As a result, an additional meeting had been arranged for Thursday 14 November 2013, 10.00 a.m. at which Sally Halls, Independent Chair of Shropshire's Safeguarding Children Board, would present the Board's Annual Report. This had originally been planned to take place on 9 October.

7.3 There was discussion about the role of the local authority and schools which were not performing well. Nick Bardsley, Deputy Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, commented that it was important for the local authority to be proactive rather than reactive. The Chairman asked if the local Member was made aware that a school was not performing well. The Director of Children's Services commented that it was important to respect the role of the local Member and, indeed, sometimes, the local authority was made aware of issues because of concerns raised by local Members.

- 7.4 The Principal Education Improvement Adviser suggested there was a mismatch, for example, with primary school performance in Shropshire and the Ofsted judgements and Members may wish to consider evidence of the impact of local authority challenge, support and intervention by looking at case studies.
- 7.5 As part of the discussion about the Work Programme, Adam Scott, Service Manager – Case Management, gave a brief presentation (copy attached to signed minutes) on key topics in children's social care. This identified several key developments, such as the single social work assessment, personal budget pilot for disabled children, major reform around Special Educational Needs, the overhaul of public law and availability of supported accommodation for looked after children aged 16+.
- 7.6 The Principal Education Improvement Adviser, had prepared two presentations, on high quality education and current school development, including federations, collaborations and academies, although most topics had already been discussed under the previous agenda item. More detail was provided on "narrowing the gap" and the Service Manager explained Shropshire was not doing as well as it should be for its most vulnerable children. This was suggested as a possible topic for the Committee to consider adding to its Work Programme.
- 7.7 The Chairman read out an e-mail from Mrs Fraser, who was unable to attend the meeting, as follows:
- "Firstly, I hear quite a few gripes about support services to schools. Are schools being well supported, for example by Property Services or HR support? A task and finish group could be tasked with surveying head teachers to find out if they are happy with the services and what improvements could be made. The important part is that if things can be done more efficiently, the schools can divert budget to teaching resources.
- Secondly, Ann Hartley has often said that too few of our primary schools are good or outstanding, and that it is a priority to change this. Is there a role for scrutiny to ask some specific questions of how this is going to be achieved and over what timescales, and possibly draw together some best practice examples from local (and perhaps national) success stories? I think it's fantastic that the Council is committed to improving primary education and if scrutiny can serve a useful function in helping this to happen, that would be even better. This could be done by a mixture of task and finish and select committee."
- 7.8 The Director of Children's Services concluded the debate by suggesting she would welcome Scrutiny input into the role of the local authority to support/challenge schools and what the local authority was doing to narrow the attainment gap for vulnerable children.

**7.9 RESOLVED:**

A That the following issues be added to the Committee's Work Programme:

- Ofsted inspections and the role of the local authority to support and challenge schools.
- Primary schools judged to be good or outstanding: To scrutinise how to improve the numbers of primary schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding.
- Narrowing the gap in educational attainment: To scrutinise what the local authority can do to reduce the current gap in attainment between vulnerable and non-vulnerable children.
- Support services to schools: To scrutinise whether schools are happy with the support services provided by the local authority and what improvements could be made.

**8. Date of Next Meeting**

8.1 It was confirmed the next scheduled meeting was due to take place on Wednesday 9 October 2013, 1.30 p.m. at Shirehall.

**Signed.....Chairman**

**Date.....**