

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

23rd MARCH 2012

A MEETING of the SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on FRIDAY 23RD MARCH 2012 at 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT :

Chair – Councillor Chris Mills

Councillors Andrew Bosmans, Rachel Hodson, Pat Knight and Sue Wilkinson

Co-Opted Members:

Mr John Hoare – Diocese of Sheffield Church of England
Mr John Parkes – Parent Governor (Primary Sector)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the Vice Chair Councillor Hilary McNamee, Councillors R. Allan Jones, Pat Porritt, Kevin Rodgers and Doreen Woodhouse and from Councillor Eric Tatton-Kelly (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

39. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTEREST

No declarations were made at the meeting.

40. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16th FEBRUARY 2012

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th February 2012, be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

41. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

No public statements were made at the meeting.

42. EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Chair introduced a report that presented the findings and recommendations of the Panel's Review into Education of Children in Care.

The Panel had agreed to undertake the review as evidence showed that children in care were underachieving in their education and generally performing less well than those who were in stable family settings. As part of the review, Members met with officers, social workers, school representatives and staff at children's residential units.

The Chair asked Members to consider and confirm the recommendations outlined in Appendix A of the report which were as follows:-

- A. That the foster care role includes mandatory regular training/ meetings with the local authority. For Example, the possible introduction of a monthly meeting/partnership working group and include training specifically aimed at improving educational attainment.
- B. Exploring possible meetings for existing and new school governors, with a representative(s) from the Children in Care team, to address their specific role and responsibility and how to challenge schools with regards to the educational needs of looked after children.
- C. Ongoing support to the Council's leadership in ensuring all schools accept children in care onto their registers.
- D. Increasing the IT equipment provision in children's residential units.
- E. Investigating the availability of access for children in care to educational internet websites.
- F. Investigating how access by children in care to after school activities/additional learning classes is affected by fixed home to school transport arrangements.

The Panel was generally agreeable with the recommendations but made the following comments:-

Members emphasised that children in care should have the same access to IT equipment and technology that a child living in a stable family setting would have. They noted that access to computer equipment in residential homes was extremely limited and a discussion ensued on the possibility of utilising redundant equipment when employees vacated their current office base and moved into the CCQ building. In the meantime, Members suggested that there were probably surplus computers and printers available in offices at the moment that could be utilised in the short term.

Further discussion ensued on accessibility to certain internet and social network sites that, under the Council's internet security system, was not permitted. In addition, Members felt that in this modern age, most children had access to multi-gaming equipment such as Playstation, Xbox and Wii, and consideration should be given to ensuring that children in

care were also able to enjoy this pastime. The Director of Children and Young People's Service agreed with these comments but explained that careful consideration would need to be given to safeguarding issues when allowing children in care access to such sites and limiting their time on equipment in the same way a parent might limit their own children. He advised the Panel that he would ask one of his officers to undertake a review into internet access and the availability of computer and gaming equipment for children in care.

The Panel welcomed this action and suggested that Recommendations D and E should be combined and strengthened to emphasise the relevance of this recommendation.

Further minor amendments were suggested in respect of Recommendation A and B as follows:-

Recommendation A - delete the use of the word 'mandatory' when referring to foster carers attending training or meetings with the Local Authority.

Recommendation B – within the 'reason' for the recommendation, one Member suggested that the word 'possibly' be deleted from the last sentence and to include induction and training meetings in addition to Governors' Forum meetings as an outlet for school governors to meet with representatives from the Children in Care Team.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments and summarised the points raised. She then asked the Scrutiny Consultant to revise the recommendations to incorporate Members' suggestions which would then be circulated to the Panel for approval prior to submission to the Executive for consideration. In the meantime, the Director advised that he would arrange for the review to be undertaken in respect of internet access and the availability of computer and gaming equipment for children in care.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the recommendations of the Working Group as detailed in appendix A of the report, be agreed subject to the suggested amendments as outlined above;
- (2) the Scrutiny Consultant produce a revised list of recommendations and forward to the Panel for approval prior to submission to the Executive for consideration; and
- (3) The Director of Children and Young People's Service be asked to arrange for a review to be undertaken in respect of internet access and the availability of computer and gaming equipment for children in care.

38. SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PLAN 2011/12

Members received a report which provided an update on the Panel's 2011/12 work plan and included the following:

Items considered at the meeting held on 16th February 2012

Following the discussions held at the last meeting in respect of the health of children in care and performance information, copies of the correspondence forwarded to the Mayor was attached to the report. The Scrutiny Consultant circulated responses from the Mayor in respect of both issues.

The response in respect of the Health of Children in Care provided details of the various bodies that would be involved in commissioning and overseeing the commissioning of Children's services in Doncaster.

The Director of Children and Young People's Service accepted that the changing system would present a challenge to ensure the co-ordination and oversight of vital functions to secure continuous improvement of practice in both adult and children's services.

Details of local actions to mitigate risks of fragmented care for children in care were outlined in the Mayor's response and included the following:-

- Continue to develop the Strategy and Implementation of One Team Working across health and social care provider services, to progress integration, communication and child centred services
- Develop a joined up approach to commissioning priorities and intentions between new health commissioning groups and DMBC
- Continue the joined up approach to performance management of the pathway for children in care
- Continued responsibility of the NHS to identify senior doctors and senior nurses to discharge its statutory functions in undertaking the role of designated professionals, to assure quality service provision for Children in Care.

Members discussed the pathway that a child coming into care followed and raised their concern over whether all relevant agencies came together effectively to meet the needs of the child. The Director advised the Panel that 4 specialist GP's had been identified to carry out the initial medical and added that all the structures and resources were in place and were being closely monitored. He agreed to produce for the next work-plan report, a diagram that would explain the process in greater detail and he would provide an update on how this worked in practice.

Doncaster Children's Trust Board

The Panel noted the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2012 which were attached to the report. Members felt that in order to maintain the link with the Board, substitute Members should be appointed to ensure that there was always someone from the Panel in attendance.

Councillor Eric Tatton-Kelly, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Key Priorities

Details of Councillor Tatton-Kelly's priorities were outlined in Appendix E attached to the report.

Recommendations made to the Executive – Update

Members noted the list of recommendations made following each of the Panel's meetings from 27 June 2011 to 16 February 2012 and noted actions taken and progress made. The Director provided a further update in respect of each of the recommendations and thanked the Panel for their input and commitment into achieving the valuable outcomes.

In respect of the Elective Home Education Review recommendations, the Director informed the Panel that during a visit by the House of Commons Select Committee for Education as part of a review on Child Protection, he had been able to raise his concerns in respect of the lack of power of the Authority to monitor the progress of a child who was receiving home education. He advised the Panel that notes of the visit were being compiled, a copy of which he could forward to Members once completed.

Work Plan 2012/13

At the last Panel meeting, Members were asked to give consideration to topics that could be put forward as a starting point for the 2012/13 Panel work plan.

A discussion took place during which Members put forward the following suggestions as topics for consideration:-

Child Protection Improvement Plan 12/13: The Director advised that a draft improvement plan had been produced for consideration at the Children's Board on 30th March which included the following 5 priorities:

- Education: working with schools that cause concern, elective home education and education of children in care
- Improve professional practice and casework
- Children in Care – service improvements, education and health
- Developing the whole system
- Budget

Role of the Local Authority in the World of Academies

School attendance: focusing on truancy, holidays, transient population.

Quality of Teaching and Learning: Members voiced their concern that a significant amount of teaching was being undertaken by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HTLA). The Director was unsure whether there were any guidelines set down in legislation in this respect and agreed to look into it. In the meantime, he stated that this was an issue that the HTLA should raise with their Headteacher or Union.

Career Paths of Children and Young People: Members were concerned to note the disappearance of careers advice services such as Connexions.

Fostering Function

Adoption Function

Sex Education and Sexual Health of Young People

The Chair thanked Members for their suggestions and it was agreed that the new Panel would focus on one main topic at its first meeting and the others would be put onto a recommendation list for the Panel's consideration at their informal meeting.

To conclude the meeting, the Scrutiny Consultant advised Members of the provisional dates set for the informal Panel meetings as follows:-

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee	22.05.12 at 9.30 a.m.
Regeneration and Environment OS Panel	22.05.12 at 1.00 p.m.
Adults and Communities OS Panel	24.05.12 at 2.00 p.m.
Schools, Children and Young People OS Panel	30.05.12 at 11.00 a.m.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the contents of the report and verbal update, be noted;
- (2) the Child Protection Improvement Plan for 2012/13 be agreed as the main topic for consideration by the Panel at its first meeting in the next municipal year;
- (3) the following items be incorporated into a recommendation list for consideration by the Panel at their informal Panel meeting in May:-
 - Role of the Local Authority in the World of Academies
 - School attendance
 - Quality of Teaching and Learning
 - Career Paths of Children and Young People

- Fostering Function
 - Adoption Function
 - Sex Education and Sexual Health of Young People
- (4) the Director of Children and Young People Service be asked to produce a diagram for inclusion in the workplan report that outlines the pathway of a child coming into care and the subsequent access to healthcare;
- (5) That consideration be given to the appointment of a substitute member on the Children's Board; and
- (6) that, when available, the Director of Children and Young People's Service circulate to Members, a copy of the notes of the visit by the House of Commons Select Committee for Education.

At the end of the meeting, the Chair conveyed her thanks to Officers and Members of the Panel for their hard work, commitment and support throughout the year.