
To
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Date 10th October 2007

Subject
Update on Scrutiny Board 2 (Children, Learning & Young People) Work Programme

1 Purpose of the Briefing Note

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Co-ordination committee as to the progress of the Scrutiny Board 2 Work programme.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to note the Briefing Note and discuss with the Board's Chair any issues arising as appropriate.

3 Background / Information

- 3.1 Between May and September the Board have held five formal Board meetings plus an additional informal one to prepare for the meeting dedicated to the Cabinet Member Strategic Plan.

Issues that the Board have considered so far include:

4 Acceleration of the Grace Academy

- 4.1 The Board considered a proposal to accelerate the opening of the Grace Academy (currently Woodway Park School) to September 2008. After considering this issue in some detail the Board made a number of observations to Cabinet regarding their concerns about "opening" the new Academy in the old school buildings, and issues concerning the residual risk to the City Council of these buildings. These issues were subsequently resolved prior to the proposal (to accelerate the opening) being approved by Cabinet.

5 School Admissions Criteria

- 5.1 The Government has recently amended admissions guidance, and the Board was briefed on the changes required to local policies. The Board have received representations from the representative of the Catholic Diocese and the Chair has

requested further information about the implications of admissions criteria for Catholic children if agreement cannot be reached.

6 Government Funding Consultation

6.1 The Board considered a recent Government consultation on proposed changes to the education funding regime. The proposals mainly concerned:

- The Distribution of DSG to Local Authorities
- School Funding from 2008-09
- Funding for Specialised Diplomas at 14-16
- Early Years Funding
- Specific Grants

7 Coventry Safeguarding Children Board / Laming Compliance Audit / Bichard Audit

7.1 The June meeting of the Board concentrated on a number of issues relating to the safeguarding of children.

7.2 The Board received the results of the annual audit of compliance with the recommendations of the Lord Laming Report (which followed the death of Victoria Climbié). This showed that the City Council continued to operate with good levels of practice, and that the work of the various children's social work teams was generally very good indeed. This audit will evolve in the future as the regulatory landscape changes.

7.3 Similarly the recommendations of the Bichard Inquiry (reported following the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman) were also reported as being well embedded in practice across the City Council. The Board will be discussing with the Director later in the year how these audits might best be reported in the future.

7.4 The Director also introduced the work of the Coventry Safeguarding Children Board. This Board has a statutory responsibility to keep children and young people in the City safe. It also has a role in promoting work to keep children safe from harm and works to ensure that all agencies in the City are effective in their work to safeguard and promote the safety of children.

7.5 The City Council is a key part of the Board and Council officers are actively involved in supporting its work. Part of the Scrutiny Board's role is to ensure that the Safeguarding Board is achieving its objectives and the Board will work with the Director to ensure an appropriate mechanism for this to be effectively achieved.

8 Children and Young People's Plan

8.1 The Board considered the draft for the proposed plan for year 2 of the current plan. This document intended to be the main driver for improvements to services for children for all agencies across the City forms an important part of the Council's self assessment ahead of the forthcoming Annual Performance Assessment. The Board queried a number of areas of activity in the plan and following their discussions requested more detailed information regarding a number of issues.

9 Cabinet Member Strategic Plan

- 9.1 The Board devoted a full meeting to considering questioning and discussing the Cabinet Member Strategic Plan for Children, Learning and Young People. School standards; underachieving groups; exclusions; SEN / Inclusion strategy; family literacy and numeracy programmes; the recent increase in the number of looked after children and staff training and development were amongst the issues discussed at the meeting.

10 14-19 Agenda

- 10.1 One of the issues the Board requested more detailed information on concerns the developing 14-19 agenda including government plans for diplomas and the opportunity for young people to study for an International Baccalaureate. The Government has also abolished the Department for Education and Skills and replaced that with a Department for Children, Schools and Families and a Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills.
- 10.2 Government organisational changes will also filter down to local authorities with new duties and responsibilities on the City Council to co-ordinate and promote the delivery of this ambitious agenda. They will also involve a reduced role for local Learning and Skills Councils. The Board were re-assured that with its existing system of school federations Coventry was well placed to take advantage of the proposed changes and work was at an advanced stage in preparing for the delivery of the different options which must be available to all students.

11 Young People and Anti-Social Behaviour

- 11.1 The Board was briefed by officers from the Directorate for Children, Learning and Young People and the Chief Executive's Directorate concerning concerted efforts locally to support young people and encourage them to engage in positive behaviours. A number of exciting projects are under way across the City, many with the active support of the local Police. The Board noted that it is far easier for young people to get bad publicity for poor behaviour than good publicity for positive behaviour and encouraged officers to re-double efforts to promote much of the good work going on in the City.

12 Building Schools for the Future

- 12.1 The Scrutiny Review Group established last year continues to meet and act as a Member body to advise and question progress in this major project. The Group has recently held a meeting to discuss the project and was pleased to note that a training session on Local Education Partnerships (LEPs) has been arranged for Thursday October 11th (starting lunch at 1.30pm with a buffet lunch provided).

13 Site Visits to Children's Homes

- 13.1 The Board has recently arranged for a series of site visits to the City Councils three Children's Homes (Wisteria, Broad Park House and The Grange) and will follow these up over the next couple of months with visits to the neighbourhood Children's Services teams.

14 Policy of Severe Weather and the Emergency Closure of Schools

- 14.1 The Board's next substantive business concerns a review of the policy and guidance to schools in the event of severe weather. Also included in the next agenda is an update on the current position regarding the provision of short breaks to children and young people with learning disabilities.

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