

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2009 at County Hall, Northallerton.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Paul Richardson in the Chair.

County Councillors:- Andrew Backhouse, John Batt, David Blades, Janet Jefferson, Chris Pearson, Joe Plant, Caroline Seymour, Tim Swales and Geoff Webber.

Members Other Than County Councillors:-

Rev. Adrian Judd (Church of England), Helena McGouran (Roman Catholic Church), Chris Head (Secondary Teacher Representative) Bjorn Risi and Judith Bromfield (Voluntary Sector).

In attendance:-

Executive Members:- County Councillors Jim Clark, Caroline Patmore and Heather Garnett.

Officers:- Cynthia Welbourn, Suzanne Firth, Ian Marr and Jon Coates (Children and Young People's Service), Stephanie Bratcher (Scrutiny Support) and Mary Davies (Legal and Democratic Services).

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Elizabeth Casling, Melva Steckles and John Blackie, Jos Huddleston (Non-Conformist Church), Dr Patricia Stowell and Suzanne Morris (Parent Governors) and Anne Swift (Primary Teacher Representative).

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

12. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2009 having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

13. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Committee was advised that no notice had been received of any public questions or statements to be made at the meeting.

14. REVIEW OF SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR HARROGATE COMMUNITY SECONDARY SCHOOLS FROM 2011

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service reporting on the outcome of the consultation undertaken on admissions arrangements governing the allocation of school places at Harrogate High School, Harrogate Grammar School and Rossett School.

County Councillor Jim Clark, introduced the report saying that this had been an extensive consultation exercise for the County Council and he thanked Officers for

the amount of work which had been carried out consulting with parents and schools. Twenty two consultation meetings had been held and thirty four schools had been involved. A report had been taken to Executive on the 10 November 2009 and approval had been given to consult on the proposed admissions arrangement for the three Schools in Harrogate as described in Appendix 7 to the report until the end of January 2010; a report would then be taken to County Council in February 2010.

County Councillor Geoff Webber echoed the comments made by the Executive Member on the hard work carried out by Officers during the consultation exercise. In regard to the two zone approach County Councillor Geoff Webber gave his support and suggested that the Adjudicator would see the option as an immediate solution to the original problem; however he had concerns with the 21%/79% ratio for the proportional system, looking at town and rural children as two groups and also on the waiting factor which he suggested was not logical. County Councillor Geoff Webber highlighted that it would be possible for parents to buy into Harrogate Grammar School by purchasing a house near to the school and this would mean that other children would be disadvantaged. He said although he had concerns with some of the detail in the report he supported the basic principle.

Cynthia Welbourn, Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service, explained that the report set out clearly the logic to waiting which was built up from consultations with parents. The authority could not disregard rurality issues but needed to balance the issues of both town and rural parents in the best possible way. She noted during consultations with parents, both in the town and rural areas, there had been agreement that it was important to find some common ground and one of the factors that both sets of parents judged important was the proportion between the town and rural areas. The degree of change for children in rural areas from 100% for their first choice school to approximately 50% seemed too great a degree of change; she noted that the distance tie breaker seemed to be the least unfair system, although she recognised that it would disappoint some people. A lottery system had been considered but there had been little support for it and consideration had been given to a 34 multi zone option, in order to seek distribution of places equally over the whole area, but most of those consulted had felt that this was too complex.

Members made the following comments:

- A covering report which laid out the expected processes after the consultation period finished would have been useful. The Chairman highlighted that the process had been outlined in earlier papers.

Members agreed that on completion of the consultation process a report should be brought to the Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise before going to the Executive.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the information in the report and provided at the meeting be noted.
- (b) That a report be brought to the Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the completion of the consultation process.

15. OFSTED SAFEGUARDING INSPECTION

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service reporting on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children in North Yorkshire and recommendations found within the inspection report published by Ofsted together with a post-inspection Action Plan for the Committee’s information.

The Chairman recognised that it had been a very challenging inspection and recorded the thanks of the Committee for the excellent work which had been carried out by Members and Officers. He highlighted during his interview the Inspectors had verbally stated that accountability did not stop at the Children and Young People’s Directorate but carried on through the organisation to Partners and for safeguarding especially to Councillors in their Corporate Parenting role.

County Councillor Caroline Patmore said that a copy of the Ofsted Inspection Report had been sent to all Members; the report had also gone to the Executive with a draft action plan and had been accepted. She advised of a letter from the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families acknowledging the results and the co-operation which had been given to Inspectors.

Cynthia Welbourn, Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service, acknowledged that it had been a difficult year for the local authority and its partners and said that the inspection had been challenging but that she did not disagree with any of its findings. She explained the grade descriptors that had been given in the report, which were tougher than in previous years and stressed the action plan related to things for the County Council to do even though it was an inspection of all partners including the Primary Care Trust.

Members made the following comments:

- Paragraph 10 of the report on overall effectiveness had noted areas of priority action for some child protection procedures. Cynthia Welbourn advised of a programme of training for managers and front line staff which focussed on Child Protection Procedures and reinforced performance management training.
- The use of agency staff; it was noted on page 31 of the action plan children were “not happy” with changes in their Social Workers. Cynthia Welbourn acknowledged the use of agency staff and assured Members that they were well qualified and given the necessary training, including IT training, before they started work. Cynthia Welbourn explained that agency staff were used to keep staffing levels high, to cover vacancies and any staff sickness.
- The action plan had noted inadequacies in the local authority’s IT system and was this something for the Corporate Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee to look into. Cynthia Welbourn highlighted sections 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 of the action plan and advised of ongoing improvement work to deliver the authority’s priorities. She advised of a meeting with Officers in the New Year to discuss the IT system and any further improvements which needed to be made and a report would then be taken to Executive.
- The legal limitations of the Inspection and when another inspection would be held. Cynthia Welbourn advised that full Ofsted inspections were held every 3 years but that there could be unannounced inspections within this time. She explained that if any recommendations made following the Ofsted inspection were not being delivered, another full inspection could be implemented.

County Councillor Caroline Patmore advised of ongoing work in regard to the Corporate Parenting Group with greater emphasis for Members into the process. She said that she would be consulting with the Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services on Constitutional issues and would report back to the Committee.

County Councillor Caroline Seymour requested that the outcome of discussion with the Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services on the status of the Corporate Parent Group is discussed at Committee before it goes to County Council.

County Councillor Geoffrey Webber raised the point that Members in general did not receive any information on or arising from Corporate Parent Meetings. County Councillor Caroline Patmore acknowledged that some Members had difficulty understanding their Corporate Parenting role and that this was something she was working to improve. The Chairman suggested that an email be sent to all Members with details of where the next Corporate Parenting meeting would be taking place.

County Councillor Caroline Patmore referred to the financial implications set out in the report and the need for the support of the Council in making the necessary funding available to meet the requirements.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children in North Yorkshire be noted.
- (b) That the contents of the post-implementation Action Plan be noted.
- (c) That the outline proposal, structure and status of the Corporate Parent Group is brought to Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee prior to County Council.

16. INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHAPING SERVICES

The Chairman agreed to hear both reports before asking Members for their comments.

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service updating on developments in the active engagement of children and young people across the Children's Trust.

Ian Marr, Senior Officer (Active Engagement & Positive Activities, Children and Young People's Service) introduced the report highlighting the work which had been carried out through the Children and Young People's Service for children and young people, including young parents. He advised on the work of the Voice, Influence and Participation (VIP) Group at paragraph 3 of the report and the development of a new Integrated Participation Strategy which would ensure effective engagement in the Children's Trust.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH COUNCILS IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service updating on the development of Youth Councils across North Yorkshire.

Jon Coates, Senior Officer (Learning Youth and Skills, Children and Young People's Service) introduced the report saying that the North Yorkshire Youth Councils had been operating for two years and were centred in 20 locations where young people could meet easily and provide an opportunity to influence decision making in the area. Jon Coates stressed that it was essential for members of the Youth Council to be democratic as they were supporting young people and not just voicing their own concerns; to have access to a power base to committees and structures which make decisions; and, to be able to act on matters which affect young people. He gave an update of the first meeting of the North Yorkshire Youth Council on the 28 October 2009 in York. The meeting had been very positive with an underlying message to get things moving and that feedback would be fed into the United Kingdom Youth Parliament.

County Councillor Heather Garnett highlighted the mixture of involvement by County Councillors with Youth Council's across the County. She said many County Councillors needed to do more to enter the world of young people and that differences in cultures could create barriers.

Members made the following comments:

- Highlighted in Scarborough that school councils encouraged young people to be actively involved in Youth Council engagement.
- The importance of the Youth Council to feel involved. It was suggested that there should be opportunities for young people to visit other areas and observe what was happening there and engaged in the process.
- That County Councillor's should be invited to speak at Youth Council meetings. Jon Coates agreed that there should be better engagement between Councillors and Youth Council members.
- The importance of Youth Council's involvement with Voluntary Organisations.

Appendix 2 to the report was handed to Members during the meeting. A copy is included in the Minute Book.

The Chairman thanked Ian Marr and Jon Coates for their very informative report.

RESOLVED –

That the information in the reports and provided during the meeting be noted.

17. WORK PROGRAMME

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Corporate Performance presenting the work programme and inviting comment.

The Scrutiny Support Officer introduced the report which she said was self explanatory on the School Meals Service, the Corporate Parenting Standing Group, the Safeguarding Training Event on the 20 October 2009 and the In-depth Scrutiny

Review – Young people Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET). She highlighted that the meeting on the 11 December 2009 would now be a mid cycle briefing and not a full committee.

The Chairman said that the Safeguarding training on the 20 October 2009 had been very informative and that he would ask for this training to be given again in the New Year.

County Councillor Joe Plant raised the matter of Free School Meals and a child's entitlement to vouchers which allowed them to participate in different activities. He requested that the Committee obtained further information as he was concerned that parents may not be aware of the scheme.

The Chairman suggested that this issue is covered at the next Mid Cycle Briefing on the 11th December and invited County Councillor Joe Plant to attend.

County Councillor Janet Jefferson also mentioned that the Area Liaison Forum in Scarborough had highlighted a scheme open to children aged 5 to 16 which entitled each child to spend a maximum of £300 each on recreational activities.

The Chairman suggested as this was not an area the Committee had come across before that both issues would be covered in more detail at the Mid Cycle Briefing. He added that although the meeting was for group spokespersons anyone on the Committee could attend.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the report and Members comments be noted.

MD/ALJ