

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 3rd October, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	B.F. Ashton (Chairman)
	Councillor	J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	G. Lucas, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling
	Parent Governor Members	Mrs. C. Woolley (Secondary School Parent Governors)
	Teacher Representatives	M. Carter (Special Education Sector Teachers) and C. Lewandowski (Secondary School teachers)
	Headteacher Representatives	A Marson (Secondary Headteachers) and Miss S. Peate (Primary Sector Headteachers)

In attendance: Councillors D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member - Children's Services) and R.M. Wilson

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr J.D. Griffin and Councillors: N.J.J. Davies and R.M. Manning.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

9. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions for areas of Scrutiny were received from the public. Committee Members suggested the following issues for consideration as part of the future work programme:

- Extended Schools – a presentation was requested on the extended schools system.
- Connexions Service.
- School Transport issues.
- Sexually transmitted diseases/sex education.
- Council's strategy on dyslexia.
- Provision of Education, particularly of English, for children of immigrant workers.
- Restructuring of Herefordshire Schools.

10. BRIEFING REPORT ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES - SCHOOL SUPPORT

The Committee received a briefing on a number of key areas of work within Children's Services and debated issues around the key areas of attendance, attainment, behaviour, exclusions and drug education.

Attendance

The Head of Children's & Student's Services reported that Children's Services continued to work closely with schools to reduce truancy rates which locally continued to be below the national average. The Service embraced the Government's 'Penalty Notice' initiative as an alternative to prosecuting parents/carers. Herefordshire was one of the leading authorities using the initiative. During the 2004/05 academic year 204 Penalty Notice Warnings had been issued resulting in 43 full Penalty Notices. 'Truancy sweeps' continued to be carried out, however, the majority of young people stopped had legitimate reasons for being out of school.

The Committee noted that contact was made with the parent/guardian after 10 unauthorised absences and that, depending on circumstances, a Penalty Notice Warning may be issued after 20 unauthorised absences. Appropriate support was offered to the parent in an attempt to resolve the situation. The Committee felt that unfortunately there was still a minority of parents who didn't value education and for whom court action wouldn't make a difference. The Committee appreciated that despite the best efforts of the parents some pupils were still absent during the day. It was further noted that despite headteachers actively discouraging holiday absences during term time a number of such absences still occurred.

Attainment

The Head of School Effectiveness presented the provisional 2005 results for Herefordshire the details of which were set out in the report. He highlighted that past experience indicated that, due to re-marking of exam papers etc, the 2005 figures may be revised upwards by between 1% and 2%. He commented that in general, it looked like a 'steady' performance rather than one marked by very significant gains. The English performance at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 was good but it was disappointing that the mathematics results at level 4 (Key Stage 2) had not improved. In addition, the 5A*-C figure at GCSE had apparently plateaued for a second year, although some individual schools had done well.

The Committee noted that the Service was working on getting an improvement in mathematics. However, at KS2 the two stumbling blocks seemed to be that the level of parental assistance/involvement declined and that some pupils had difficulties adjusting to the more complex use of mathematics.

The New Ofsted Inspection System for Schools

The Head of School Effectiveness reported that from September 2005 a new school inspection system was being introduced whereby every school would be inspected every three years. The new system would mean that schools would receive no more than one week's notice of inspection; there would be fewer inspectors, who would be in school for no more than 2 days, and schools must have an up-to-date self-evaluation form, together with appropriate performance data. A school's overall effectiveness and efficiency would be graded either: Outstanding; Good; Satisfactory or Inadequate. While outcomes could not be guaranteed, the Council had high expectations that no school should be graded inadequate.

The Committee noted that teachers had received training on the wide range of data available to schools to help identify trends and improve performance. It was

suggested that a seminar for the Committee and other members of the Council be arranged to explain the range of data and its uses.

Behaviour Support

The Head of Children's & Student's Services reported upon the range of initiatives and support available to schools and parents, as set out in the report, who had to deal with children who presented unacceptable behaviour. Good links were maintained with other agencies, highlighted by the current Behaviour Support Plan, which was regularly monitored by the Behaviour Forum. Evidence of improvement in behaviour in schools generally was reflected in the gradual but steady decrease in permanent exclusions from 35 in the academic year 01-02, to 29 in 04-05.

The Committee debated issues or questions relating to: an alleged lack of parental involvement during pupil counselling; whether Government pressure on schools to reduce the number of pupil exclusions had resulted in the apparent reduced numbers; whether data was collected on instances of abuse directed towards teaching staff; while there had been no shortage of places at PRUs there had been pressure on the system due to staff shortages and what input the Youth Service could make on the issue.

The Head of School Effectiveness reported that a national report on pupil behaviour was expected later in the year and suggested that, in view of the range of issues involved the Committee may wish to discuss the subject further in a workshop setting.

Social Inclusion

The Manager of Pupil, School and Parent Support reported that in most cases exclusion from school would be the last resort after a range of measures had been tried to improve pupils' behaviour. The report outlined the measures available to headteachers; the services available and the number of permanent exclusions over the last 6 years.

Drug education in schools

The Manager of Pupil, School and Parent Support reported that Herefordshire had demonstrated its commitment to this important area of work in local schools by appointing a specialist Drugs Education Development Officer, who offered advice, guidance and support to schools, worked with various agencies and had been the key officer for developing local resources for schools as indicated in the report. In line with the latest research the Directorate took the approach of harm reduction rather than the less effective 'Just Say No' campaigns. In schools the Directorate encouraged lessons that were teacher led and focused on making decisions about personal risk and whether or not students understood all the consequences of their actions concerning particular drugs or substances.

The Committee noted a suggested link between drug use, particularly skunk, and the increase in mental health problems, particularly in younger people. It was also noted that a new package of training was available for KS1 pupils. The Committee were informed that while drug education was taken very seriously in schools the take up of resources was not always good due to the wide range of pressures already on schools. The Committee noted a comment that new teachers from teacher training colleges seemed to be inadequately trained in drug education issues. It was appreciated that a range of measures were needed to tackle the drug problem. Unfortunately some parents still had a very casual attitude towards alcohol and drugs.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the following member events be arranged:

- **A seminar to explain the range of data available to schools and its use in improving school performance.**
- **A workshop on the range of issues concerning pupil behaviour in schools.**

11. INSPECTION OF HEREFORDSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITY FOSTERING SERVICE

The Committee considered the action taken by the Children's Services Directorate in response to the requirements and recommendations of the Inspection of Herefordshire Local Authority Fostering Service undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

The Head of Social Care (Children) reported that inspectors had compiled the 2005 report, copies of which had been forwarded separately to Committee Members, after attending a meeting of the Fostering Panel, reviewing policy documents and case files on foster carers and children, and undertaking visits to a range of individuals and groups over a two-week period. In 2004, 31 of the 32 National Standards had been inspected. In 2005, Inspectors had been pleased to find that all the inspection shortfalls identified in 2004 had been addressed promptly, with systems reviewed and developed to ensure improvement. All 32 standards had been inspected. 28 were met in full and there were minor shortfalls in 4. An action plan indicating progress to date in response to the inspection findings was appended to the report.

The Committee congratulated the Fostering Service Team on the outcome of the inspection and noted the actions taken to address the limited number of issues arising from the inspection.

The Committee debated the staff vacancies in the Foster Care Service and noted that, while the issue was a national problem, the Service was working on various methods of filling vacancies. A previous suggestion that the local Ward Member be a contact point for support to Foster Carers in their area was being discussed with Carers. Headteacher representatives commented on the link between pupil attendance/ attainment and having a stable domestic environment.

The Chairman suggested that a visit to the Service be arranged to enable Committee Members to see first hand what the work of the Fostering Service entailed.

RESOLVED: That the Director of Children's Services convey to staff the congratulations of the Committee on the outcome of the 2005 Fostering Service inspection.

12. REVIEW OF STATUTORY AND CO-OPTED MEMBERS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the Statutory and co-opted membership on the Committee.

A report by the County Secretary and Solicitor set out the current statutory (Diocesan and Parent Governors) and co-opted (Teacher and Headteacher) membership of the Committee. The report sought to regularise a number of membership issues and highlighted a number of considerations in relation to the possible co-option of representatives to reflect the wider remit of the Committee.

The Committee expressed its appreciation of the input by the statutory and co-opted members of the Committee. In view of the wider remit of the Committee following

Every Child Matters and the Children Act 2004, they acknowledged the need for wider representation from, in particular, the Foster Carers and Children Social Care Social Worker sectors.

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) commented upon the 'Youth Matters' Green Paper and in particular its possible effect upon the remit of the Committee.

RESOLVED:**That**

- a) **The Diocesan Authority membership as set out in paragraphs 4-6 of the report be reaffirmed and the County Secretary and Solicitor request that the Authorities reconsider or reaffirm their nomination prior to Council elections;**
- b) **The Parent Governor membership and terms of office as set out in paragraphs 7-10 of the report be reaffirmed;**
- c) **With a view to reflecting the wider remit of the Committee the Director of Children's Services in consultation with Chairman and Vice-Chairman consider the appropriate sectors, number and term of office of the non-voting co-opted representatives on the Committee and report to a future meeting.**

The meeting ended at 12.03 p.m.

CHAIRMAN