

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 FEBRUARY 2014**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR JOHN DUNCOMB HOUGH (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors B Adams (Vice-Chairman), W J Aron, Mrs J Brockway, J P Churchill, S R Dodds, A G Hagues, J R Hicks, B W Keimach, C R Oxby, Mrs N J Smith, Mrs C A Talbot, S M Tweedale, L Wootten, R Wootten and Mrs S M Wray

Added Members

Church Representatives: Mr S C Rudman and Mrs G Wright

Parent Representatives: Mr C V Miller, Mrs E Olivier-Townrow and Dr E van der Zee

Councillors: attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Debbie Barnes (Executive Director Children's Services), Keith Batty (Assistant Director of CfBT Education Services), Stuart Carlton (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Katrina Cope (Team Leader Democratic and Civic Services), Tracy Johnson (Scrutiny Officer), Rebecca Allen (Commissioning Officer), Tim Culpin (Head of School Improvement), Andrew McLean (Commissioning Manager - Children's Services) and Jane Salt (Senior Advisor)

67 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Hunter-Clarke, Mrs S Ransome and Mrs L A Rollings.

An apology for absence was also received from Mr P Thompson (Church Representative Added Member).

68 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of Members' interests were made at this stage of proceedings.

69 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(a) Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2013
RESOLVED

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That the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 29 November 2013 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

(b) Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2014
RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 10 January 2014 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

70 SMALL SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Consideration was given to a report from the Executive Director of Children's Services, which invited the Committee to consider and comment on supporting the Collaborative Partnerships Project.

The Committee was advised by the Head of School Improvement that in 2011, Lincolnshire County Council had launched the Small Schools Collaborative Partnership Project, which was aimed at encouraging primary schools with less than 200 pupils to work together. The partnership was to help support small rural schools.

In January 2012, Lincolnshire County Council had proposed a collaborative partnership scheme. Details of the scheme were shown on page 22 of the agenda.

It was reported that research had shown that school partnerships helped increase educational standards and encouraged the best use of resources through sharing best practice and improving efficiencies through economies of scale.

Schools had been receptive to the aims of the proposal but argued that the scheme was too rigid. Also, the Department for Education's (DfE) changes to the rules concerning Local Authority funding formulae made it impossible for the Council to target funding for partnerships. As a result of the concerns raised the scheme was revised. Full details of the revised scheme were shown on page 23 of the agenda.

By January 2014, it was reported that there were 40 active partnerships across Lincolnshire and that was generally considered to be successful. The schools involved in the Collaborative Partnership Project had made good progress. The Committee was advised that the results of a survey sent to all partnerships had been very positive. 62% of local partnerships responded with 96% reporting improvement as a result of partnership working, and with 90% seeing financial benefits, particularly via joint Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Some of the activities which partnerships had found most beneficial were:-

- Head teachers sharing their schools data with other schools;
- Joint learning walks, 'drop – ins' and lesson observations in each other's schools;
- Joint professional development;

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- Monitoring and moderation across schools;
- Schools within a partnership scheduling and running shared INSETs and common training days;
- SENCOs undertaking joint training and coordinating their work;
- Special events; and
- School business management, procurement etc.

It was highlighted that head teachers had commented that they were feeling less isolated and were now able to share their concerns and problems with other head teachers. Detailed within the report were specific comments from head teachers.

It was reported although the project had been successful there were still a number of challenges to overcome. At the moment there was several projects being undertaken to help more things forward. One of these was 'Delivering Effective Feedback through Digital Technology', which aimed to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly those eligible for Pupil Premium and to enhance the skills of teachers to use digital technology to support the giving of feedback and providing opportunities for peer review. The Committee noted that as part of this project, there had been liaison with Professor Steve Higgins from Durham University, who had a particular interest in this type of work. Other projects included developing Leadership through Performance Management; and Developing Peer Review within Partnerships of Schools.

The Committee was advised that CfBT was funding a National Small Rural Schools Research Project led by Robert Hill who was an adviser to the Government. The study highlighted the current challenges facing small rural primary schools and the scope for different forms of partnership as a response to these challenges. The project would provide a commentary on the national context supported by a major case study based on the experience of the schools supported in Lincolnshire. It was agreed that a copy of the report from the study would be circulated to the Committee once it was completed.

In conclusion, the Committee were advised that in order to ensure Lincolnshire's many small schools do not suffer as a result of these changes, the Collaborative Partnership Project needed to continue to be developed further.

During discussion, the Committee made particular reference to the following issues:-

- That a strategy was needed to get all schools to participate in collaborative working. It was highlighted that it was important to get governors on board as some had reluctance to partnership working because of the anxiety of academy status. One member suggested that governors should be invited to attend any future collaborative workshops, and that examples of collaborative working should be shared with governors to encourage them to take part in the project. Officers agreed to look into inviting governors to the conference for 2014;
- The Committee was advised that partnership working had been trialled recently two schools had participating in a combined event involving a maths trial and a visit to a castle, this event had drawn in lots of children all working together. It was highlighted that similar working methods had taken place in

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the 1980's and that this had worked very well and was fully supported by Lincolnshire County Council. The scheme had given teachers the opportunity to up skill, and gain experience in another school. It was highlighted that this was why officers wanted to extend the offer to larger primary schools, so that the smaller rural schools could benefit from sharing staff resources. A suggestion was made as to whether the principle of sharing and up skilling teaching staff could be promoted. It was highlighted that this was happening, but that there was more that could be offered to ensure that no school gets left behind;

- Money incentive – Members were advised that in the first year there had been a money incentive, but due to changes in funding, the Local Authority was not able to protect funding for partnerships. The Council therefore increased the block allocation to all primary schools, so that no funding was lost. Officers confirmed that it was difficult to incentivise, but that head teachers were encouraged to use the funding for collaborative working;
- Collaborative working - Some members highlighted that it was encouraging to hear that collaborative partnerships were working, and that numerous benefits had been identified as a result of the partnerships. Some examples of partnership working were shared with the Committee, one of which was that one primary school had closed, as its premises were being used as a polling station. As a result, the pupils had gone across the road to another school, which had accommodated the pupils from both schools working side by side for the day;
- Offer to larger primary schools - Officers advised that larger primary schools would also be invited to take part in the project, and that it was also hoped to extend collaborative working to secondary schools in the future;
- Training for Clerks to Governors – It was reported that there was a need for more training for clerks to governors to ensure that they are kept up to date with legislation changes. Provision also needed to be made for refresher training as and when the need arose. The Committee was advised that training was offered to clerks to governors. Officers agreed to look in to the issue further to see what could be improved;
- In-house training courses for teachers - One member enquired as to whether the Council still ran subject based courses. The Committee was advised that courses were still part of the offer, but at the moment there was reluctance for Head teachers and teachers to come out of school, therefore a lot of training was taking place within schools. It was highlighted that training in schools was essential and invaluable in the development of teachers;
- Communication – It was highlighted that in order for schools to be encouraged to participate, it was felt that the concept needed to be communicated better to the schools in the first instance. A suggestion was made of possibly using a newsletter as a communication tool. The Committee was advised that there was currently a newsletter for the project. The project was also promoted at Head teachers' briefings and the annual conference. However, officers agreed to reflect and see what could be improved. Officers also highlighted that as part of transforming how the Council worked with schools, they would also look at communicating to schools in a more collaborative way; and
- Transportation between schools - The Committee was advised that most schools that worked in partnership were within a 15 mile radius. However, if

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transport was needed then it was up to the individual school to pay for transport costs out of their own budget. The Committee was advised that brokerage had stopped, as smaller schools were no able to take on the liability.

The Committee was advised that in East Lindsey, as a result of one the Head teacher's connections, 20 schools were now involved in a project with Professor Higgins, who was doing a watching brief and collecting data to see how effective the partnership was working in East Lindsey.

In conclusion, it was agreed that officers would look into inviting governors to attend the annual conference, and that members of the Committee would be given the opportunity to attend, if they so wished. Furthermore, officers agreed to look into training for Clerks to Governors, continue working on trying to get larger primary schools and secondary schools involved in the Collaborative Working Project and that progress on the project would be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that continued support be given to the collaborative partnerships project.

71 EARLY HELP OFFER AND STRATEGY

The Committee gave consideration to a report from the Executive Director of Children's Services, which provided information on providing early help to children and families in Lincolnshire and highlighted areas for development to improve on the current position.

It was reported that the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership had agreed to introduce a system to improve the process of working together to meet the needs of children and families through the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child in 2006. Working Together to Safeguard Children was introduced in April 2013, and this guidance placed an emphasis on the importance of early help in promoting the welfare of children, together with clear arrangements for collaboration.

It was highlighted that Lincolnshire's Early Help Offer identified that there was a need for help for children and families as soon as problems started to emerge, or when there was a strong likelihood that problems would emerge in the future. The Offer was not just for very young children, but included universal and targeted services and was designed to reduce, or prevent specific problems from escalating or becoming entrenched.

The critical features of an effective early help offer included a multi-disciplinary approach that brought together a range of professionals; a relationship with a trusted Lead Professional who could engage with the child and the family; provide families with support so that they could develop their own capacity to deal with issues, and

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look at things with a more holistic approach to address the child in the wider family, and to provide a more streamlined and simple assessment process.

Attached to the report at Appendix A was a copy of Lincolnshire Children's Services Early Help Offer, and at Appendix B was a copy of the Lincolnshire Children's Services Early Strategy, which outlined Lincolnshire's current Early Help Offer for the Committee to consider.

The Early Help Strategy outlined the areas of work partners were committed to, to improve Early Help arrangements in Lincolnshire.

During discussion, some concern was raised as to whether all the relevant organisations involved in the Early Help Strategy had the capacity to deliver the help needed to troubled families. The Committee was advised that although the budgets available were reducing, there was a need to look further into what was being done; ensuring that there was no duplication and making sure that what was being done was being done in the most effective manner. The Strategy, as part of the modernised working would ensure that enough help was provided to enable troubled families to help themselves.

Some concern was also raised with regard to referrals on page 38 of the Early Help Offer document that in order for an early assessment to be effective when the family/child did not consent, then the Lead Professional would make a judgement as to whether, without help, the needs of the child would escalate. If that was the case then a referral to the local authority children's social care might be necessary. The Committee was advised that there were only a few schools concerns that reached the Child Protection Threshold.

It was highlighted on Page 41 of the Early Help Offer (Appendix A) that there was no longer a midwifery managed unit at the Grantham and District Hospital.

Some members extended their concerns with regard to the importance of School Nurses and Health Visitors in the life of a child. The Committee was advised that School Nurses were commissioned through Public Health and that Health Visitors (Commissioning of the Healthy Child Programme) would come over to the Local Authority in 2015. It was noted that work was currently underway to look at the opportunities that this might create, and to identify the best way to take this forward, to avoid duplication. It was reported that some discussions had taken place with Public Health already as to how Children's Services felt the School Nurse service should be provided. The issue would need to be debated further by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee as to what the Public Help offer for children should look like. Some members felt very strongly that Schools Nurses needed to be involved in the pastoral life of a child.

A further area highlighted was concerning a child's readiness for school and whether there was a definition as to what that was. Some members of the Committee expressed concerns that young children were now attending school when they were not toilet trained. It was highlighted further that some of these young children regressed during the school holidays as they were not receiving the support they

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needed. The Executive Director asked members of the Committee to let her know of any specific cases, so that the Team Around the Child could provide support through the school holidays to those individual children and their families. Officers confirmed that the definition of ready for school was a flexible judgemental view measured from the "Early Years Stage Profile" and it was very difficult to define as there was a range with regard to school readiness, and that each schools offer might be different. Officers advised that there was the potential to set up a County wide parenting service to help those families who needed extra help. Officers were aware that there were families in need, and it was highlighted that Children's Centres had targeted provision and that once Health Visitors' were transferred in 2015, the provision would be assessed and services transformed.

In conclusion, the Committee recognised the problems Children's Services had regarding reduced funding for service provision, and to the success of its services, but felt that it was very important to support vulnerable children and their families.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

72 CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Committee gave consideration to a report from the Executive Director of Children's Services, which provided the Committee with a background to the duties of the Child Poverty Act 2010 on local authorities, and provided an overview of the latest HMRC 2011 data released, which identified how Lincolnshire compared to its statistical neighbours, regional authorities and nationally against the 'Children in Low-Income Families Local Measure'.

It was noted that the Council's Executive had agreed that the monitoring of the Child Poverty Strategy was to be governed through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), in line with the requirement for Partner co-operation in mitigating the effects of Child Poverty.

The report focussed on the progress, content and governance arrangements of the Child Poverty Action Plan and outlined the development of a (CYPSP) Child Poverty Sub-Group, which was chaired by Dr Tony Hill, Director of Public Health.

Appended to the report were the following documents:-

Appendix A – A copy of the Child Poverty Strategy;
Appendix B – A copy of the Child Poverty Action Plan;
Appendix C - The CYPSP Child Poverty Governance Map; and
Appendix D – A copy of the CYPSP Child Poverty Scorecard.

The Committee received a joint presentation of the report from the Head of Service – Children's Commissioning and the Commissioning Officer.

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It was highlighted that the CYPSP monitored and reviewed progress against the Action Plan, which identified key resource activity areas, which were to be focussed on for review for the next 12 months. Due to the extensive scope of the Action Plan, it had been agreed that a Child Poverty Sub-Group was to be established and would be chaired by the Director of Public Health. The membership of the group would include key partners involved in the delivery of the Action Plan and the Committee was advised that a workshop had been arranged for early 2014, to assist sub-group members in understanding the wider implications of child poverty and the impact their own project had in tackling it.

Full details of the consultation undertaken were detailed in the report presented.

Discussion ensued, from which reference was made to the following issues:-

- Page 115 – Reference was made to the fact that the strategy was not just a Children's Services Strategy, it was a joint strategy which required all stakeholders to work together in an integrated way to target shared priorities and eliminate duplication of effort;
- Page 118 - The cost to society from loss of revenue;
- Page 125 - Economic poverty - Reference was made to the fact that if people were paid the living wage, this would help them move out of the poverty trap;
- Page 144 Lincolnshire Community Assistance Scheme – It was reported that arrangements were in place to manage the Social Fund and levels of take up;
- Action Plan – Members expressed some concern that the Action Plan was not robust enough. The Committee was reassured that for each project, there were multiple projects feeding in. It would be part of the of the Sub – Committees remit to keep a watching brief on the progress;
- A question was asked as to whether the uptake of free schools meals was going to be monitored. The Committee was advised that it was the intention to increase the uptake of free school meals. It was highlighted that a scheme was to be instigated in Lincoln through Housing Benefit claimants. The District Council would contact the family to identify who the County Council should contact; and
- Some concern was expressed as to the conflicting data included in the report. Officers explained the reasoning behind data provided and the discrepancies between actual number and statistical percentages.

In conclusion, the Committee was unhappy about accountability, and how that was to be achieved, as there were no targets in the Action Plan to measure the outcomes. A suggestion was made for a more thematic approach, which identified what each of the component areas had to achieve and what effect this would have for children in poverty.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress made so far against the Child Poverty Action Plan be noted.

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2. That a further more detailed progress report for each identified theme be scheduled in for future meetings, which identifies the outcomes to be achieved, and highlights the benefits for children in poverty. Theme leads to attend and provide a detailed update.

73 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK
 PROGRAMME 2014

A report by the Scrutiny Officer was considered, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider its work programme for the coming year.

A revised copy of the work programme was circulated to members at the meeting. The revised programme had been amended to allow for a maximum number of six items per agenda in the future. A list had also been created which identified 'items to be scheduled', and that these items would be discussed at each pre-meeting to identify which items should be brought forward.

The Scrutiny Officer highlighted that there were already two potential pre-decision scrutiny reports which would have to be presented to the July meeting.

Members were also reminded that visits to the Families Working Together teams were currently being arranged, and that dates would be brought to the Committee in March as part of the Families Working Together report.

Other items suggested by the Committee for the inclusion in future agendas were an update on the newly appointed eight Regional Commissioners and an update on the Ofsted Improvement Inspection. It was reported that the Ofsted Improvement Inspection was already listed for the 25 April 2014 meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the revised work programme as set out at Appendix A be agreed subject to an update on the newly appointed eight Regional Commissioners being added to the Items to be Scheduled list.
2. That the contents of the Children's Services Forward Plan, as set out in Appendix B to the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 1.00 pm