

APPENDIX A

Annual Report of Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee 2006/07

Following last year's election and the reconfiguration of scrutiny committees, this has been the first year of work for the new Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee. The sub-committee is responsible for the overview and scrutiny of all aspects of children's services and issues within the borough affecting children and young people, including health. It has been a busy, challenging and fulfilling year. We have welcomed a number of new councillors and co-optees to scrutiny and it has been important that everyone has been able to develop knowledge of the subject areas and taken advice from other scrutiny colleagues who have previously scrutinised the issues.

In planning for this year and future years, the sub-committee has organised its work programme to cover each of the outcomes of the Every Child Matters programme. These are:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being



At committee

In committee meetings we have held discussions with officers on a range of issues including:

- Achieving economic well-being – plans and progress in the borough
- Adoption – progress following an inspection of local adoption services
- Children and Young People's Plan
- Children's services budget
- Children's services performance – exam results across the borough
- Community plan
- Extended schools
- Governing body recruitment and retention
- Harrow Sixth Form Collegiate developments
- Harrow Teachers Centre – access arrangements
- Healthy lifestyles in schools
- Joint Area Review
- School food improvement strategy and water provision within schools
- Social care complaints annual report
- Special educational needs statements

Additionally, members conducted two reviews (Looked After Children and School Nursing) and held a question and answer session with the relevant portfolio holders – Portfolio Holders for People First Children's Services, and Legal Services and Issues Facing Young People. During this session, the sub-committee asked a range of questions based around the Every Child Matters themes to enable the committee's dual roles of both scrutiny and policy development.

The sub-committee has followed up and monitored progress made in areas previously considered by the former Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee, for example on the distribution of special educational needs statements, the recruitment and retention of school governors and healthy lifestyles in schools.

Review work

This year scrutiny has piloted a number of new ways of working in seeking to improve how scrutiny is conducted in Harrow. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee has employed two of these methodologies in its review work – a challenge panel to explore school nursing provision and a light touch review to investigate corporate parenting roles and responsibilities for looked after children.

Held in late November, the challenge panel on school nursing brought together a range of partners from the council, Harrow Primary Care Trust and North West London Hospitals Trust into discussions with councillors on issues relating to the future provision of school nursing in the borough. It also sought the views of stakeholders from the Royal College of Nursing and the Association of Harrow Governing Bodies and made use of some of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's advisory support for health scrutiny. The PCT will be drawing up a service specification redefining the service in Harrow and scrutiny input into these discussions should add value to the process.

Case study: spotlight on the light touch review of the education of looked after children

Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on the local authority in its role as corporate parent to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. This review examined the way in which the council and its members fulfil the role of corporate parents and in doing so, promotes better understanding of the roles and responsibilities as well as assessing the adequacy of services to looked after children.



A light touch review is a new methodology whereby a review is commissioned at one committee meeting to report back to the next. Following an initial meeting to set its terms of reference, the review group conducted much of its evidence gathering and analysis electronically (conducted online/virtually over the summer holiday period), culminating in a question and answer session with the portfolio holder and the Director of Children's Services. The review group greatly welcomed the valuable contribution of its co-optee Mr Alton Bell who represented the Association of Harrow Governing Bodies and is a local foster carer.

The review tested a new way of working for scrutiny and how it can work, as well as raising awareness among members about the subject matter and their responsibilities as 'corporate parents' - this is especially pertinent for newer members.

Originally suggested as a topic for scrutiny by officers within Children's Services, the review's timing was helpful in corporate preparations for the Joint Area Review. Subsequently, scrutiny's findings and recommendations have been used in the council's response to the government green paper on looked after children.

Involving key stakeholders

Committee meetings have offered a good opportunity to involve our statutory co-optees (parents governors and representatives from the Westminster Diocese and Church of England) and engage their valuable expertise and insight in local issues.

Primarily through our reviews we have engaged a number of stakeholders in our work: Association of Harrow Governing Bodies, Harrow Primary Care Trust, North West London Hospitals Trust and the Royal College of Nursing. There was also an article written on the sub-committee's work and reviews for a newsletter which reaches all the school governors in the borough.

What people had to say about Children and Young People scrutiny...

About the School Nursing Challenge Panel:

"I felt the process was clear, concise and well-managed. It felt supportive rather than confrontational allowing officers and members to work together to find solutions." (Anonymous)

About the report of the School Nursing Challenge Panel:

"A very useful document for taking the issues forward." (Harrow Council Officer)

About the Looked After Children light touch review:

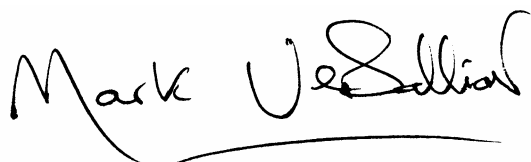
"If there's one thing of which I'm most proud it's this committee's commitment to developing our dual role of both critical friend and policy developer; particularly in an area as important as children and young people." (Councillor Mark Versallion, Chairman Children & Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee)

Future plans

In the next year we have an exciting project looking at the growing problem of obesity in the borough. For the first time, this will be a review jointly conducted between two sub-Committees (with Adult Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee) and will cover obesity from childhood through to adulthood. More specifically for children's issues, this should help explore obesity strategies in relation to early years, working with schools and in providing leisure opportunities for young people.

This review will give us a chance to work closely with and influence the work of local partners, especially Harrow Primary Care Trust. Scrutiny will be able to add value to local policy and work on tackling a growing problem in society - one that impacts greatly on the lives of local residents and the services provided for them.

We will look to refresh our work programme shortly and will also make sure that issues considered this year are appropriately followed up. Last year, we compiled a four-year work programme for 2006-2010, covering each of the five themes under Every Child Matters. We will continue to look at this and refresh it accordingly to prioritise the issues we look at as a Committee over the course of the forthcoming year. In the long term we will continue to monitor progress on previous work and help shape local policy around key children and young people's issues.



Councillor Mark Versallion

Chairman, Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Statistical information

Committee meetings	5
Number of reviews	2: Looked After Children Light Touch Review: Councillors Versallion, Davine, Green, Mudhar, Suresh, Zeid and Mr Alton Bell School Nursing Challenge Panel: Councillors Gate, Merison, Perry, Suresh, Teli and Mrs Christine Millard
Visits/informal meetings	1 (preparatory meeting for Question and Answer session with Portfolio Holders)
Attendance by portfolio holders	Councillor Janet Mote (Portfolio Holder for People First Children's Services) - one meeting Councillor Paul Osborn (Portfolio holder for Legal Services and Issues Facing Young People) - one meeting