

Children's and Young Peoples Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CYPS O & S)

Chairs Annual Report 2007/08

I was elected by my Group to Chair CYPS O & S in May 2007. CYPS is one of the largest County Council fundholders and covers all aspects of child and young people's services.

As part of my personal development plan I received training from Margaret Martin in Scrutiny & Chair techniques which I found helpful, but has brought about questions in Scrutiny procedure and provision which will need to be resolved by others.

Meetings & Agenda Items

Under my Chairmanship CYPS O & S has held 8 meetings & we have examined the following issues

1. Review of the Children and Young People's Plan 2006-9 and Joint Area Review Self Assessment
2. Safeguarding Children
3. Youth Service Review
4. Report of the Review Panel on Looked After Children
5. Strategy for the future organisation of Leicestershire Secondary Schools
6. Overview of Outcomes in Key Stage Tests and Examinations 2007
7. Implementation of Extended Services in Leicestershire
8. CYPS Budget
9. Re-organisation of schools in Melton Mowbray and the Vale of Belvoir; proposals to consult on changes to secondary catchment areas
10. Alignment of Extended Services in Leicestershire to the National Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures
11. Joint Area Review - Final Report and JAR Action Plan
12. The Purpose of the Youth Service
13. Vision and Strategy for Future Organisation of Children and Young People's Plan 2008 to 2011
14. Up-date on progress on the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel on Attainment and Attendance of Looked After Children

A number of 'Urgent Items' were heard including a letter from Ofsted that gave the outcome of the Annual Performance Assessment for 2007, what action could be taken by the Authority to assist some 50 Leicestershire schools currently operating a budget deficit and per pupil funding

We also heard a petition for 11-16/18 Education in the Loughborough area

Around 10 questions from individual Members of the Authority such as a question on the relationship of the 'Local Authority' and redundancies at Birkett House, the number of mobile classrooms in Leicestershire schools, per pupil funding School Deficits, Future Numbers and Surplus Places, Catchment Areas for Melton, Demographic data and forecasting.

Review of Scrutiny

As part of the Review of Scrutiny I asked if we could start the process of being more focused on the inquisitorial aspect of scrutiny, and taking firm recommendations to Cabinet. Papers 'for Members information' would be presented to CYPS O & S as 'briefing papers' and only discussed at a later meeting if asked by a Committee Member. I also wanted the number of items to be scrutinised to be reduced so that more time could be used for focused questioning. I did get some criticism from Committee Members about reductions in agenda items but the process does seem to be working and members are asking detailed and very technical questions. I feel that the scrutiny process of holding the Administration to account is moving to the expectations of the Audit Commission.

However, the reduction in agenda items has resulted in the increase of the number of meetings and in October 07 and April 08 two meetings in one month were held.

I have also demanded that Officer briefing by 'Power Point' presentation during Scrutiny be scrapped as this reduces debate and questioning, and I have also told Officers to keep the introduction to agenda items brief as I expect all Board Members to have read their papers prior to the meeting.

There will be occasions when a detailed presentation by Officers will be required with the use of 'death by Power Point', but I feel that this should be undertaken as a specific briefing session with an invitation to all Members of the Authority.

Moving on

1. There is a clash of expectations between the 'Leicestershire Culture & Process' and the ideals of scrutiny being developed by outside institutions. I will push at the boundaries but as an individual Committee we can only go so far, and many matters need to be resolved by the political Leaders locally and by legislation nationally.
2. I feel strongly that more support needs to be given to individual Members on understanding the need for detailed Scrutiny and Scrutiny training. I feel that Members want to do the job 'properly' but feel unsupported with methodology.
3. There has been criticism on the number and detailed required for questions. However, every Member has the right to ask questions at Scrutiny and to curtail this would stifle debate.
4. CYPS O & S is unique as it has a number of Co-Opted Members. However, I feel that we should consider using the co-option methodology in having a 'young person' on the Committee to represent Leicestershire's youth.
5. Unfortunately we only had one meeting during the year with independent 'outside' witnesses; I need to ensure that we increase the use of outside witnesses.
6. We also need to give Officers more precise instructions on what the Committee is 'looking for', and our outcomes need to be more focused.
7. I have had discussions with Officers on how recommendations are to be scribed and agreed by Committee before the meeting concludes. One or two ideas are being bounced around, and I hope to have a process in place by the next meeting.
8. Consideration should be made for Chairs of Scrutiny Committees to explain and answer to Cabinet recommendations made (in a non partisan position)

9. CYPS is the largest Department and as schools move away from Local authority control we must take a much closer look at other aspects of the Department particularly on the social care side.
10. The relationship between schools and the LA is changing from provider authority to providing assistance. The relationship between schools, the LA and Scrutiny needs to be re-assessed.

Finally

I want to thank all Officers at all levels for their help during the year. I have found that all questions have been answered and explanations given.

I also want to thank my two fellow Spokes for the past year, Don Wright and David Snartt who have provided me with considerable support and help. We now meet regularly prior to briefings without Officers to discuss issues, and this has been most useful.

John Legrys Chair Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Overview - May 2008