

SEN GROUP (LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE)

Record of the meeting of the Special Educational Needs Sub-Group.

Members Present

Michael Brand (MB) Brenda Jennings (BJ)

Officer Attending

Patricia Radford (TR) (Parent Partnership officer - pupil Support/Statementing Team)

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 During questions by the SEN Group to Peter Scott (PS) the effect of the new portfolio structure on management reporting lines/responsibilities was raised. PS illustrated this with reference to the statementing team.
- 1.2 The SEN group delegated MB and BJ to ask questions at officer level to shed light on this and report back on statementing process and closer working across departments.
- 1.3 MB made contact with Student Support officer and suggested that TR would be best placed to answer questions.

ISSUES RAISED:

2 MANAGEMENTSTRUCTURE

- 2.1 TR showed line management chart of PS's teams (appendix 1).

The four areas of activity and relevant portfolios were:

- Admissions (Schools portfolio);
- Home to school Transport (Schools portfolio);
- Pupil Support
(Deals with statements and exclusions).

(Statements in Children portfolio. Exclusions in Schools portfolio):

- Student support (Higher Education grants etc)
(Community Services Portfolio);

TR is in Pupil support team .

- 2.2 We noted that PS team is spread across three portfolios.

3 THE STATEMENTING PROCESS

- 3.1 TR explained the process (leaflet available).
- 3.2 TR pointed out that the health authority have a duty to notify LEA of a child under five who may have special needs.
- 3.3 For very young children the referrals come largely through paediatric clinics. TR says this works well.
- 3.4 Referrals also come via schools as children are admitted.
- 3.5 Parents themselves can also refer -but most are via school referrals.
- 3.6 Pupil Support Team co-ordinate the statementing process and gather appropriate reports from various professionals including Educational Psychologists.

Note: the shortage of LEA Educational Psychologists and other professionals may become a significant factor in statement delays.

- 3.7 Having gathered the reports the Pupil Support Team will assess the child and produce a Statement if appropriate.

4 WHAT NEXT?

- 4.1 Any Statement will require the child's (and family's?) needs to be delivered by a variety of agencies - in particular Education/Social Services/Health.
- 4.2 At this point "who funds what" debate takes place between agencies. However this is too often on the basis of managers' budget headings rather than the child's needs.

If officers protect their budgets this can result in "the child falling through the net."

TR "Funding is key in terms of supporting children."

- 4.3 TR illustrates this with an example of statementing a child who has educational needs (Educational budget) but could live at home. However the family needs respite care (Social Services budget) but as no SS money is available the child boards at BCC Special school - (cost?).

Because this place is now taken, another child who actually needs in-County boarding is sent out-of-county at much greater expense.

Result: Total bill much greater than necessary simply because Social Services had not paid for respite care for family of child 1.

- 4.4 TR says the culture is beginning to change. A joint Officer Group is actively involved in driving this.

5 WHAT EFFECT WILL THE CABINET PORTFOLIO STRUCTURE HAVE?

- 5.1 TR: The role for BCC is to define the broad structure and allow cross working to evolve.

She supports the principle of the children's' portfolio but clarity is important and "the sooner we know where responsibility lies the better ." (Clearly at officer level there is confusion).

- 5.2 Parents will react to confusion and there is confusion at client level at present.

- 5.3 Portfolio holders are strategic not operational.

6 Q: WHAT WILL BE THE EFFECT OF DELEGATING MORE SEN MONEY TO SCHOOLS?

- 6.1 TR: As more funds are delegated it is important to ensure they are not lost in the school's general budget.

- 6.2 TR points out that schools have responsibilities and the LEA must monitor . Bust she agrees that monitoring is not inspection and LEA must develop mechanisms.

7 Q: IN YOUR ROLE AS PARENT PARTNERSHIP OFFICER, WHAT LINES OF COMMUNICATION ARE OPEN

- 7.1 TR points out that in the past two Parent representatives were appointed to sit on the SEN Panel but this Panel has been discontinued. "This is a real loss."

- 7.2 One Parent representative was also appointed to Children's Board - also discontinued.

- 7.3 TR does not see how Parents Consultative Group can now feed its view back to Members.

- 7.4 She is concerned that portfolio holders will not have time to take account of parents' views in all the work they are doing.