

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2012 at 6.00 pm in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford**

**PRESENT:** Councillors G Green (Chair), M. Ion, A. Mackenzie, C. Turley and Co-optees S. Ali, A. Atkinson.

**Attending:** Clive Jones, Assistant Director Family & Cohesion Services; Di Partridge, Service Delivery Manager Children's Specialist Services; Michael Bennett, Lead Joint Commissioning and Contracting Manager; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist; Tracy Clarke, Scrutiny Officer.

#### **CYPSC-51 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

#### **CYPSC-52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllrs. S. Burrell, J. Greenaway, K. Guy, J. Loveridge and Co-optees S. Harris, M. Ward.

#### **CYPSC-53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **CYPSC-54 CHILDREN IN CARE MONITORING INFORMATION**

Members considered the standing monitoring information for children in care which had been circulated with the papers for the meeting and made the following observations:

- That the Committee should continue to monitor information relating to children in care at each meeting, but that data needed to be analysed, set in context and challenged.
- The Committee should link into the cross-party Corporate Parenting working group and the Children and Families Board, and requested that their action plans be brought to a future meeting.
- The Committee will need to agree its priorities for scrutinising corporate parenting issues during 2012/13 as part of its work planning.

#### **CYPSC-55 CHILDREN'S AUTISM STRATEGY**

The Telford & Wrekin All Age Autistic Spectrum Conditions Strategy 2012-2015 had been reviewed by the Health Scrutiny Committee in March, and had been referred to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to look at the elements for children in more detail. The Strategy, various public information packs and the Telford &

Wrekin ASD Referral Pathway for school age had been circulated to Members before the meeting.

Michael Bennett, Clive Jones and Di Partridge made some introductory points:

- The Autism Act had placed a requirement on local authorities to develop an Autism Strategy for adults by March 2012. In Telford & Wrekin a decision had been taken to develop an all-age Strategy had this work had been overseen by a Strategic Steering Group including Shropshire and South Staffordshire Health NHS Foundation Trust (the mental health trust) and local partners. The Carers' Forum and other stakeholders had been involved. The Strategy had been signed off at the end of March, but further work was on-going especially around the transition pathways from children's to adult services. The Transition team covered age 14-25.
- Some key issues were identified as:
  - The difficulty in identifying and diagnosing Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) - the spectrum is wide, and behaviour exhibited may be the same as children with language, behavioural, social or emotional difficulties.
  - The need for early recognition so that the right support can be provided, and the need for clear pathways from children to adult services where young people can lose support or fall through the net.
  - The lack of special school provision within the borough - children placed out of borough can be "hidden" and difficult to repatriate, and the costs are high.
  - Lack of awareness amongst parents about how to access support.
  - The need to support parents to help them manage ASC.
  - Difficulty of collecting accurate data to inform provision and measure progress - children may be misdiagnosed or undiagnosed.
  - Potential lack of awareness within schools.
- Michelle Troth was the Autism Co-ordinator in Telford & Wrekin. The responsibilities of the role included supporting parents with information and sign-posting, co-ordinating work with partners, supporting training and awareness raising, liaising with schools and data collection. An early intervention, multi-disciplinary unit had been set up to support children age 2-5 and their families. Work was done with schools and the ASD referral pathway had been developed for school age children.

Members considered the information provided, and the following additional information was given in response to further questioning:

- It was agreed early intervention was key. The early intervention, multi-agency hubs included mental health practitioners, and support would be put in wrapped around the child. Michelle Troth supported multi-agency working by collecting information from assessments and passing it on to diagnosticians. There was a good diagnostic unit at Stepping Stones.
- The Autism Co-ordinator provided information and sign-posting so parents know where to access help, and can be supported to help them manage ASC behaviour. A range of professionals could be involved such as educational psychologists,

speech therapists etc. Parent support groups were being set up. A record of children with disabilities was being built up so that information and support could be provided, and provision planned. The impact on siblings was also important and CAMHS had been involved in helping siblings to develop coping strategies. Members could refer parents and carers in their wards to the Autism Co-ordinator and contact details would be circulated after the meeting.

- Training and support was being put in place to bring schools across the borough up to a consistent standard. Teachers needed to be vigilant to notice the signs of autism, and to help children and young people diagnosed with ASC learn how to cope with situations they find difficult and to prepare them for life outside school. The secondary schools in Telford & Wrekin were generally good, and some had put in extra training for staff and were getting accreditation. Outreach workers delivered training in schools. Primary schools were generally aware of the issues and head teachers tended to know which secondaries would be sympathetic to the needs of the child so that they could be referred appropriately. However, the approach to the transition between years 6 and 7 was patchy and there was a need to improve communication links and share best practice. Members suggested this could be discussed at meetings of primary and secondary heads.
- Historically, the typical referral pathway had been from GPs direct to CAMHS, but the ideal pathway was for GPs to refer to the Early Intervention hubs to access the multi-agency teams including mental health practitioners. Progress is monitored and if necessary, a referral can then be made to CAMHS. More work needed to be done with GPs because this referral pathway was not always followed.
- With regard to quantifying the number and needs of children with ASC, this was problematic. Children on School Action Plus (SAP) or assessed as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) was a starting point, but some children with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) may have been statemented as ASC because they exhibited the same signs, and children with multiple needs may have been statemented as ASC when they had more complex needs. There had also been a “labelling trend” towards ASC as a relatively new condition which further skewed the picture. It was therefore not possible to quantify the actual number of children with ASC from these records. Quantifying the number of children with ASC diagnoses was also problematic as there were three diagnostic centres - Children’s Development Centre, paediatricians and CAMHS - and the information was not centralised. Accurate data collection was a national problem and other authorities were in the same position. This made it difficult to target support, plan provision and measure progress. To address the issue, the Autism Co-ordinator was working with professionals to pull this information together and build up the record of disabilities which would give a more accurate position. The aim was to develop one plan which would be trialled in the Children’s Development Centre and the Council’s restructure supported this joined-up approach.
- Adults with ASC could apply for Disability Living Allowance although it was not easy to make the claims because the forms were so long. In many cases, people diagnosed with ASC were quite capable of living working and living without support.

- The Committee had previously received the Cabinet report on the proposed changes to Jigsaw. The aim was to develop Jigsaw as a school for Autism. In the short-term, the contract with the existing education provider had been extended while detailed plans were worked up but an intensive programme had already started and the intention was to gain accreditation as a centre of excellence for Autism.
- The Transition team was planning ahead to reduce the risks that happen when a young person moves into adult services. The loss of structures when a young person leaves school or moves to adult services can be very challenging and lead to worse behaviour. This is also a difficult time for parents and some are not able to cope with the extra pressure. Parents Opening Doors (PODS) is a forum for parents and carers of children with disabilities which supports parents in these kinds of situations. Housing can become an issue at this time and the Homelessness service has been brought into the Cohesion Team to integrate services.
- The Autism Co-ordinator post was funded by the PCT and there was no reason to think that the funding would be withdrawn. The Council was looking to strengthen the commissioning relationship with the Clinical Commissioning Group which would be the commissioning body once the PCT was abolished. Any issues with the funding would be flagged up to the Council. It was felt that there was sufficient capacity with a single post because of the level of support available across the team.

Members requested examples of where the Autism Co-ordinator post had saved money from early intervention.

## **CYPSC-56 WORK PROGRAMME**

Cllr. Green reminded members that this was the last meeting of the municipal year and that the work programme would be agreed by the Committee early in the new municipal year.

Austin Atkinson on behalf of the Committee thanked Cllr. Green for Chairing the Committee over the last year and for the way she had handled some sensitive matters. The Chairman thanked Tracy Clarke for her hard work in supporting the Committee and members wished her well in her new role.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

**Chairman:**

**Date:**