

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 15th August 2013, held at 6.00pm in Meeting Room 3, Darby House, Telford.

PRESENT: Councillors M. Ion (Chair), G. Green, J. Loveridge, A. Mackenzie, J. Pinter, C. Turley and Co-optees A. Atkinson, S. Rayner and M. Ward.

Attending: Karen Perry, Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding; Clive Jones, Assistant Director Family & Cohesion Services; Richard Smith, Access & Enablement Manager; Chloe de Poix, Participation Worker for Children in Care; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

CYPSC-6 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 6th June 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CYPSC-7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. T. Hope, Co-optees Mr. S. Ali, Mr. R. Aveley

CYPSC-8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CYPSC-9 UPDATE ON THE OFSTED ACTION PLAN (SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN)

A sub-item on the Leaving Care Grant (LCG) had been incorporated into this item and was discussed first. Members considered the briefing note circulated as Appendix B3, and additional information about the notional value of the grant assuming increases in line with Council Tax increases and a breakdown of the cohort aged 16 in July 2013 was tabled.

The Access & Enablement Manager made the following points:

- The authority had carried out a major restructure of operational teams in adult and children's services in 2011. The 16+ Team had moved from children's services to the Transition team in adult services, becoming the Transition and Leaving Care Team in Access & Enablement within Care & Support – the rationale being that all pathways lead to adult or family cohesion services (or the community).
- The initial move had been "lift and shift", so a fundamental review was being carried out focussed on outcomes and reducing costs, including commissioning

- processes, and separate pathways were being created for separate young people.
- In 2012 Edward Timpson (Children's Minister) had written to all Directors of Children Services urging them to increase the leaving care grant (Setting up Home Allowance) to £2,000. Nationally the allowance varied between £800 and £3,000 and regionally Telford & Wrekin at £1,000 was one of the lowest.
 - Internally there was support for increasing the grant but within a structured approach to administration, outcomes and taking the views of the Care Council (VOICE) into account. VOICE had done a significant amount of work on this and was described in the briefing note.
 - There was currently no policy for administering the grant. It was paid on an individual basis at the discretion of Personal Advisors and Social Workers.
 - A strong message needed to be generated that the grant is tied to setting up home and VOICE had recommended that it should be renamed the "Setting up Home" grant.
 - VOICE had looked at the cost of setting up home and had requested that the grant be increased to £2,000 including a £250-300 buffer for emergencies. They had also suggested that payment of the grant should be tied to formal training on enabling independent living and linked to reaching milestones in levels of independent living.

Members then made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Cllr. Mackenzie wanted to know if the young people had any supervision and training before leaving care e.g. money management, housekeeping, and whether there was a policy for ensuring care leavers have suitable accommodation in a suitable location. The Chair said these were important points and the committee could come back to them, but asked that the discussion focus specifically on the Leaving Care Grant.
- Cllr. Green said there had been a lack of clarity about the grant for some years. The Manager agreed that there had been a lot of discretion used in the past and that the current financial position had helped to focus thoughts.
- The Chair wanted to know if the grant was mandatory or discretionary. The Manager explained that all care leavers have an entitlement to the grant under leaving care legislation, but the amount is discretionary and not all young people get the grant because entitlement is linked to setting up home. If a young person is moving into furnished accommodation, or remains in a residential home or with foster carers, they do not get the grant.
- The Chair asked how the number of care leavers who would receive the grant is projected – for example, there were 40 children in foster care who would be aged 16/17 in July 2013 so he wanted to know if they would all be entitled to the grant. The Manager said that while young people are in foster care their needs are being met so they would not get any grant, but they would be entitled to it if they left the foster home and went into unfurnished accommodation. Young people are not encouraged to leave foster homes – this is against the "Staying Put" strategy.

- The Chair expressed strong concern about a number of issues: that there was a lack of clarity over entitlement and the process for who gets the grant and who doesn't, and that the amount available in Telford & Wrekin was at the lower end regionally. The Participation Worker said that the latest available information was that 95 authorities had increased the grant to £2,000 or more since October 2012.
- Cllr. Ion said he understood that the budget needed tightening but was concerned that there was a lack of clarity about the budget for the grant, how it is spent and the lack of accountability, especially when there are rising numbers of children in care. The Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding pointed out that although there had been an upward trend, the number had fallen this month.
- The Manager agreed there was not a structured approach, but assured Members that no young person had been disadvantaged as a result. There was a need for a more transparent process for supporting children in care right through from 13/14 to 25, and the Council was taking a strategic approach to this to eliminate the silo working which had existed in the past. He said a more formal process was needed for the LCG, including building in accountability for the young people in receipt of the grant for its use. We know where we are now, and will work with Care Council and operational staff to reach a policy.
- Cllr. Green said that as an elected member, if a member of the public asked her how the grant worked, she would not be able to explain it and this needed to be rectified. She did not know how many young people had got the grant in the past and how many had not. The Chair requested data for the last 7 years on how many young people had been entitled to the grant, how many had got it and how much they had got, how many hadn't go it and why. The Manager said this could be provided although it may be difficult because spending could be allocated against many different cost codes, but from his point of view the priority was looking forwards and not backwards. The Chair said he understood it may take some work, but the Committee would like this historic data.
- Cllr. Pinter said that the briefing note did not clarify what the grant is used for, and the Participation Worker said that the Care Council had agreed that the name "Leaving Care Grant" did not make it clear what the grant is for and had recommended changing the name to the "Starting Up Home" grant to make it clearer. The Manager said this would make it clearer that young people are not entitled to the grant while care is still in place.
- Cllr. Pinter queried the Care Council's recommendation that 2 years' worth of TV licences should come from the grant, and the Participation Worker explained that this already happens and is what the young people wanted.
- The Chair felt there was a principle involved - elected members have no more important priority than their responsibility as corporate parents, and as an authority Telford & Wrekin should not be below minimum national standards. The discussion had highlighted the fact that the grant had not been reviewed for 6-7 years, that there was no policy, that there was no budget allocation and that Telford

& Wrekin was at the lower reaches compared to other authorities nationally and regionally and this can be a recommendation of the scrutiny Committee.

- Members asked for clarification on the decision making timetable and the Manager said the aim was to take report to the senior management team in September with a recommendation to uplift the grant to £2,000 with a caveat that the policy has been agreed by children and adult services, and by the children and young people in care. The policy would include a mechanism for tying the grant to levels of independence. The Participation Worker said that the young people had been very clear about this and they wanted protocols around support.
- The Chair again emphasised the fact that Telford & Wrekin was not in line with other authorities and was 50% below many of them and that Telford & Wrekin young people should not be worse off than young people in neighbouring authorities.
- Mr. Rayner said that the grant should be coupled with the adoption of a Care Leavers' Charter, as recommended by Edward Timpson, and wanted to know what was happening in Telford & Wrekin about this. The Participation Worker said the Care Council had reviewed the Charter proposed nationally and did not want to adopt it in its current form – they thought it was too patronising. They had decided to review the Charter alongside the Pledge (the Council's Pledge to children and young people in care) and to incorporate the main principles of the Care Leavers' Charter into the Pledge. This would be drafted for consultation. Members requested a copy of the draft Pledge when it is released for consultation.

When there were no further questions the Manager and Participation Worker left the meeting.

Members moved on to consider the Children's Services Improvement Plan (the action plan to address Ofsted's recommendations from the inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children) circulated as Appendix B1 and the summary report circulated as Appendix B2.

The Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding (AD) opened with some comments. Ofsted had inspected the Safeguarding and Looked After Children services in June 2012. The Ofsted report and improvement plan had been presented to scrutiny in November 2012 and the fostering report in May 2013. Virtually all the actions had been delivered and would now be monitored to check they are making a difference. The new Ofsted regime would be introduced in November, and when Ofsted next returned in future they will check the recommendations have been addressed and were making a difference. The summary report highlighted the actions that were behind schedule and the AD provided some of the context for these:

- R22: "Life Story" work is complex in terms of the right person supporting the child (e.g. social worker, carer) to enable them to understand why they are in care, and to keep a record of the child's life including collecting information from before they came into care. The Life Stories are a good way of helping the child to talk about what has happened, their life now and their care experience and what is good and

what is bad. Just as parents collect photographs or mementos or information for their own children, the life stories are an important personal record for the children in care.

- R10/11: these relate to emotional wellbeing. The right staff and support need to be in place to ensure placement stability and prevent breakdown - emotional damage can present at different times and stages of life and could require CAMHS support. A Placement Stability team is under development (with a CAHMS lead post for looked after children) and in September a shadow panel will analyse past cases to review the effectiveness of support to feed into the new service model. Some young people may need hospitalisation under the Mental Health Act and there were still capacity and response issues which were being taken forward with commissioners and providers.
- R14: The ways that young people's views are recorded had been improved and ICT were working on the system - this was a technical issue – so reports could be run off and audited. The Single Assessment template had been delayed until national guidelines were published but had now been developed. The single assessment replaced the Initial + more detailed Core Assessment which the social workers have been looking forward to. During August this was being piloted in one team and would be rolled out fully in October.

Members then made comments and asked questions as follows:

- The Chair said that there had clearly been a lot of progress and congratulated officers on getting to where they were. He wanted to know if a self-assessment was done now, whether they would still judge services as “adequate” or would they be “good” and what they were telling the Cabinet member about this. The AD said that we would not yet quite be at a “good” assessment. Under the new Ofsted framework “adequate” had been replaced by “requiring improvement”.
- The Chair wanted to know what the biggest barrier to achieving an improved judgement was and the AD Children's Safeguarding said it would be the *pace* of driving a number of changes at once. The AD Family & Cohesion Services agreed some things had taken time, but a number of actions were being driven forward and really picking up pace. The workforce development strategy had taken staff through a culture change, but the Early Help offer was now moving forward with partners and was moving quickly. There was a strong focus on commissioning which was now being joined up with partners. Ofsted were interested in monitoring the impact of changes and a lot of work was going into this, for example the development of a Dashboard for Early Help. The AD Children's Safeguarding said that many of the issues that had contributed to the “adequate” rating had now been fixed. A key area of work had been the redesign of the social work service which impacted on a number of recommendations. A new model of working had been put in place in the children in care team based around small groups sharing case load information so all children had a qualified social worker and cover if their social worker was away. There was already anecdotal evidence of how the children were benefitting.

- The Chair said it was very helpful to hear from the officers because they could provide context and texture around the issues and actions which was important for members to understand, and that they had clearly done a huge amount of work. The AD Children's Safeguarding said that in future some examples could possibly be provided to scrutiny about the difference that had been made for the children although confidentiality must be maintained.
- Mr. Atkinson asked about Priority 8 (provide effective transition from being in care to independent living). He knew a counsellor working in another authority area who counselled many young people moving to independence and said that the vast majority felt at sea and needed more support. He wanted to know how officers felt Telford & Wrekin was performing in this area. The AD said that in Telford & Wrekin work was done with children from years 5/6 upwards to support them through school moves and moving onto higher education or independence. At any one time there were half a dozen or so care leavers at university and the Council had worked hand-in-hand with the young people to support their educational attainment. Funding was provided to help support them at university and we make sure they have accommodation during the holidays. There are some successes, but more can be done. NEETs were a problem, especially amongst care leavers so we haven't got it right yet. Mr. Atkinson was pleased accommodation during holidays had been thought about but suggested that support needs to be proactive. The Chair agreed that NEETs were a key issue to be tackled and asked if there was a causal relationship with the LCG. The AD said there was no established causal link between the leaving care grant and NEETs. Many young people remain with their foster carers throughout FE. If the grant is increased this could be an incentive to young people to set up on their own rather than being with foster carers, and without the carer's support they could be more likely to become NEET and the LCG needs to be understood in this context, and the importance of providing training programmes and support as well as financial assistance.

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked the officers present for their reports and honest appraisal and said it was important to get the texture behind the action plan. He also thanked the Service Improvement Manager in her absence for the good summary report.

CYPSC-10 CABINET RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE CARE PLACEMENT STRATEGY

The Chair said that the Committee had spent a lot of time on the review of the care placement strategy and had produced a thorough report. The report and recommendations had been presented to Cabinet on 27th June and the Cabinet member had provided a response which was agreed by Cabinet as circulated as Appendix C1. In addition to this information, the following points were discussed:

- R1: Democratic Services would drive the publication of members not undergoing corporate parenting training. The Scrutiny Officer would take this up.

- R2a: Members **requested** a copy of the new template for recording visits. The AD said this there had been difficulties using this to record on the system but the headings were used as an aide memoire so the information is captured and recorded.
- R2b: It was **agreed** a report on the return interviews would come to scrutiny in September.
- R3a: The recommendation was “partially agreed” because it had been agreed that the IROs need to be independent, but that scrutiny was not the right place for them, and they had been moved to the Education & Skills service in July. The service had been bolstered to make it more robust. There were 4.4 FTE permanent IROs, plus a temporary 12 month post had been created to deal with capacity issues. A Fostering Reviewing Officer post had also been created, responsible for reviewing external fostering agencies as well as conducting each internal foster carer’s annual review.
- R3b: It was **agreed** a report on the IROs would come to scrutiny in November.
- R4: The AD Family & Cohesion Services gave an update on the Jigsaw care contract. Better Care Keys had been appointed as the provider from the procurement exercise and had taken over the contract in August. The new provider had been well ahead of other bidders in terms of quality and price. Savings had been made on weekly unit costs compared to the previous contract: For example assuming full occupancy for one house the Council would save £2,909 per week £151k p.a. The saving will be greater when we take up the option of using a second house. The contract was running in the first house and Ofsted would be carrying out an inspection, and the second house was in the process of being set up.
 - ❖ R4a: The Chair said the response seemed to suggest that scrutiny had recommended procuring alone, but scrutiny had meant that the number of providers on the regional framework could be reduced. The AD said that there would be savings from the regional framework contract but they also needed to be mindful of the need to drive down costs locally so all options would be considered and nothing ruled out.
 - ❖ R4b: It was **agreed** that an update report would come to scrutiny in January.
- R5a: This had been accepted
- R5b: This had been partially accepted because it was felt that there was too much information to report in this level of detail every time. However, members do need to be assured that the costs are accurate, so the detailed method of calculation would be shared with scrutiny, but costs would then be reported as a single figure. The new methodology was being used – the model was developed by the West Midlands Strategic Commissioning Group which had identified best practice for fostering services. The calculation included costs for staffing from administration to management and overheads including central charges. Detailed information

had been taken from the Agresso financial system and broken down to arrive at a weekly unit cost. Applying the new methodology, the average weekly unit cost of internal foster care had increased by about £20, from about £430 to £450.

- R6a: The Chair asked where we were up to with identifying the children's home care providers. The AD said they had been identified and we know where they are and the Police also had this information.
- R6b: A provider conference had been organised for 9th October and all children's care home providers and independent fostering agencies had been invited. Members were given a copy of the programme. The aim was to ensure the providers understand how to access services to support the children in their care e.g. alcohol and drug abuse services, CAMHS. Information will be collected from the providers which will help address commissioning intentions. The regional framework contracts were used for volume placements, but some of the providers may be able to offer individual specialist placements. The police and health providers were involved with the conference. It was **agreed** that a report would be provided to scrutiny about the providers, how many and where they are, and an update on the conference at a future meeting.

The Assistant Director Family & Cohesion Services reminded members that in addition to the LCG, children in care and care leavers are also able to claim an education bursary of £1,200 for Further Education (formerly EMA) to help with books, equipment, travel, lunch etc.

RESOLVED: That the items agreed during the discussion be added to the work programme.

CYPSC-11 LGA SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PEER REVIEW

This item was deferred until the next meeting on 23rd September to allow the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families and the Director of Children & Family Services to attend.

CYPSC-12 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair thanked members who had attended the working group meeting on 28th June about the provision of primary school places. Further evidence would be taken at the next meeting. This was a national concern and members needed to be satisfied that there would be adequate primary capacity in Telford and Wrekin.

The Chair suggested some areas which he felt needed further clarification:

- The borough is a growth area with significant planned housing development – members need to be confident that the planning projection data is accurate and satisfied that there will be sufficient places.
- The Projection Guide is very complicated and members may want further clarification.

- The Net Capacity Assessment Method, which drives the PAN, dates from 2001 and it was not clear if it had been updated or whether there were alternative methodologies. Ms. Ward said from her experience and knowledge as a primary school governor that it was a very complicated process but that the School Organisation Services Manager was very good and had run the department efficiently for a long time and had handled predicted growth and absorbed it well using this methodology – it was working at the moment.
- The heads had said it was not clear to them how the PAN is calculated and how decisions are driven – scrutiny has a role in ensuring that practitioners understand the process. Mr. Atkinson agreed the committee needed to understand the process and to make sure that practitioners understand the process.
- The relationship between expansion and quality was not clear – capacity may be managed efficiently, but were standards being driven up? Ms. Ward said the PANs were very sensitive but they were essential to prevent a free for all. As a scenario, if a good school is expanded to bursting point, it could be to the detriment of another school locally which is improving but just can't attract pupils. Mr. Atkinson said we should be cautious about using popularity as a criterion for expansion because it can be so transitory.
- Concerns raised by heads about attendance at Appeals meetings compared to Shropshire.

It was agreed that members should forward suggestions of issues to explore and who to take evidence from at the next meeting to the Scrutiny Officer.

There was a further discussion about the Leaving Care Grant and it was agreed that the Committee would make a recommendation to increase the grant to £2,000 contingent on the development of a robust Policy and protocols. The Scrutiny Officer would draft wording and circulate to members for approval.

RECOMMENDED

That the Leaving Care Grant be increased to £2,000 contingent on the development of a robust Policy and protocols (wording subject to approval by Members following the meeting).

The meeting ended at 7.25pm.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....