

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 23rd September 2013 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room 3, Darby House, Telford.

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

Attending: Cllr. P. Watling, Cabinet Member Children, Young People & Families; L. Johnston, Director Children & Family Services; C. Jones, Assistant Director Family & Cohesion Services; S. Hosking, Group Manager Youth Offending Service; A. Mason, Chair Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

CYPSC-13 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 15th August 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CYPSC-14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. A. Mackenzie and Co-optees S. Ali, S. Harris and M. Ward.

CYPSC-15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CYPSC-16 LGA PEER REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING

The Director of Children & Family Services (DCS) presented the reports circulated as Appendix B1 and B2 on the LGA Peer Review. A briefing note on the peer review process and a diagram of the "Getting to Good" Improvement Cycle were also tabled. The following points were highlighted:

- The first peer review was three years ago. Peer reviews are a "critical friend" process to test the authority's understanding and self-awareness of the service and what needs to be done. Additional lines of enquiry were agreed over and above the standard process at the service's request, including whether the planned reduction in the number of children on care plans had reduced safety, and an audit validation. Cllr. Watling explained that he holds weekly meetings with the Director, but he also talks directly to staff on the front-line, without senior managers present, to hear their views which was important to him as lead member. He had asked the peer review also to focus on the early help arrangements, including Family Connect, to ensure young people and families get the right help at the right

time. In the early days he had not been convinced about the Family Connect approach, but he was now convinced this was the right direction.

- A peer review cost around £20,000 but the Council had paid nothing. It was part of a sector-led improvement programme funded nationally by the Children's Improvement Board. The funding had now been withdrawn, and Telford & Wrekin had been one of the last authorities to benefit.
- The review team was led by an Interim Director of Children's Services. Ideally, reviews would be led by an active DCS but this would have created a delay resulting in incurring costs, and the Interim DCS was a good lead. The team also included a Lead Member (ex-Lambeth), a Safeguarding lead, a Data Analyst, a Health lead and LGA support staff. The Health lead was considered important with all the changes in the health system.
- The review had taken one week in June. Cllr. Watling, the DCS and Assistant Director Cohesion & Family Services had been trained as peer reviewers.
- Appendix B2 provided a summary of the process, findings, strengths and areas for improvement. Mr. Mason confirmed the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) had been involved in commissioning the peer review and was in agreement with the findings.
- The DCS said it was pleasing that there had been no big surprises in the findings and that they fitted with the service's self-assessment showing there was a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses. She summarised the key findings:
 - The review had recognised the huge amount of work that had been done on the recruitment and retention of social workers. Having a permanent workforce of skilled and qualified staff was fundamental to addressing quality issues raised by Ofsted. With this in place the service was ready to start the next stage of the journey to embed systemic improvement. Cllr. Watling said that this was also a priority in the Cost Improvement Plan and important for providing consistency to the children and young people in care.
 - The service had got better at using data to understand and drive improvement internally and across partners.
 - Partnership support was good, but there was a need for more challenge.
 - The reviewers were pleased with the Council's financial commitment to safeguarding and the additional investment in the service and had scrutinised the Cost Improvement Plan.
 - Leadership was aspirational and political leadership valued.
 - Commissioning needed development, particularly the collaborative approach with partners and health. This was already known.
 - Integrated practice was still emerging. There had been huge changes in the borough and the early help offer had started but needed pace and focus.
 - The reviewers noted that reflective practice and case recording needed to be better. It was happening, but needed to be evidenced and audited.
 - The service could move from information to action too quickly, for example the

lift and shift approach to joining up the Transition and Care Leavers teams.

This had already been known and a review was being carried out.

- The pace of change was too slow. The DCS accepted this, but said that the development of the permanent workforce was the priority and had taken time – they would not invest in training agency staff. There had also been issues with finding the right people to lead change, but this had hopefully been sorted out. The point was that this needed to be done well and there was no point in having urgency without quality.
- There was a disconnection between the aspiration of senior managers and front-line practice. Steps were being taken to address this. The Managing Director and DCS had held an engagement session with front-line staff to marry up. There would be three staff briefings a year involving the DCS, Assistant Directors and Lead Member to ensure the leadership aspiration is clear to social workers.

In response to Members' questions, the following additional information was provided:

- Cllr. Turley was alarmed by the reference on p.10 of Appendix B1 to “the disbanding of the Child Protection Team”. The DCS clarified that this referred to the re-design of the service. Under the old structure, Child Protection (CP) social workers carried out initial assessments and then referred cases to the Assessment and Case Management Teams for core assessments and case management so their involvement was short-term and the child was moved from one social worker to another. Bringing the teams together meant the service was built around the child – the first social worker continues to work with the child through different stages, providing continuity and a better service for the child. Cllr. Watling said the change had been a difficult journey for staff but the old system had not been right – for children coming into care we want the team to remain around the child and for the child not to have switches of social worker. This was one of the key areas where serious case reviews had found fault.
- Cllr. Turley was concerned about the fact that Walk-In GP surgeries use different IT systems and do not receive alerts of children on child protection plans. The DCS agreed this was a concern and said it had been picked up by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The CCG executive lead for safeguarding had been involved in the review and had taken this up to address. Cllr. Ion also expressed concern and that this was potentially “an accident waiting to happen”, and while he understood this was not within the Council’s remit, he wanted to know what pressure was being put on the CCG about this. The DCS said it would be picked up as part of the improvement model (illustrated in the tabled document “Getting to Good” Improvement Cycle). There is a named strategic lead for each action, and the CCG safeguarding lead leads on the health issues. She will report back with a set of actions and timescales, but this has yet to be defined. The service defines what needs to be done – the outcomes – and the strategic lead tells us how it will be done and is accountable for those actions. The outcome in this case might be for all GPs to be aware of children on child protection plans.
- The Chair asked about the role of the LSCB in this. Mr. Mason said the LSCB was streamlining processes and a new Quality Performance & Operations sub-group

had been set up, chaired by the CCG safeguarding lead, to review actions and progress. The sub-group would meet for the first time in November. The cycle of LSCB and sub-group meetings had been reviewed to accelerate actions and improve reporting – the Board would meet every two months and the performance sub-group will meet 2 weeks in advance to feed actions into the Board. The Board will review the peer review action plan, and the DCS will review the actions for the Council.

- The Chair referred to the Key Areas of Focus and felt that point one (identifying and reflecting in decisions the needs of children and young people from minority ethnic communities) was a huge concern. The DCS said this had also been picked up in other inspections and action was already underway. There was some good work going on but there was a mixed picture. They were talking to front line staff about this and they were helping to identify what needs to be done. Cllr. Ion said this came back to the issue of having a shared understanding of the leadership vision and common understanding of what we mean by vulnerable. Mr. Mason said it was good that the Council had flagged this up for the peer review to look at. Cllr. Watling said it was clear we need to be working on this. Work had been done but it was not as effective as it should be and this was being looked at as part of the improvement model.
- Cllr. Green was worried by the point on p.8 about not having operational experienced staff on the Family Connect duty desk. The DCS said there was a newly qualified on the desk, but with supervision and management oversight of the process which was good. Skills were being developed across the service.
- The DCS explained more about the “Getting to Good” Improvement Cycle. The idea was to move away from having action plan after action plan (e.g. Ofsted Improvement Plan, peer review action plan) and developing key strategic themes or objectives led by senior managers. Data is gathered on each theme to help understand the issues, and then taken to front-line staff to get the story behind the data and discuss their views on what could be done so that actions can be embedded in front line practice. A Service Improvement Manager had been appointed to the Delivery & Planning team to coordinate the work, but reporting directly to the DCS. The Manager would visit all the front line staff. For example, on the diversity issue, data and evidence had been gathered, and the Service Improvement Manager was now visiting staff to drill down into the data at team level to see what was happening, how work was reported and why work that was happening was not being recorded. The Manager then pulls all the information together in a One Minute Brief with the teams’ recommendations to be implemented.
- The Chair asked why the brief was “Getting to Good” and not “Getting to Outstanding”. The DCS said that “Outstanding” was just too aspirational under the new Ofsted inspection framework. Ofsted ratings had changed to “Outstanding”, “Good”, “Requiring Improvement” or “Inadequate” (i.e. there was no longer an “Adequate” rating) and the standards to achieve “Good” were had been raised. Currently, around a quarter of authorities were rated “Good”, about half were “Adequate” and a quarter “Inadequate”. Most were striving to achieve

“Good” under the new framework and were not trying to achieve “Outstanding” because the bar was too high. Mr. Mason agreed “Outstanding” was too aspirational and that setting such an unrealistic goal could de-motivate staff - improvement had to be made step by step. The LSCB was focussing on improvement and had set up a Professional Practice task and finish sub-group, including the Service Improvement Manager. This group was one of the three priority task and finish groups reporting to the Board. Cllr. Watling had attended a regional meeting for Lead Members and many of the authorities rated “Adequate” were quite concerned about the new framework and fearing the worst. The reality is that it is hugely expensive for authorities rated “Inadequate” which would cost far more than the work being done in Telford & Wrekin now – it was about saving money later on and not about overspending. Cllr. Green said that it is important to convey to members of the public what “adequate” means.

- The Chair asked the DCS and Cabinet whether they would say the peer review had delivered £20k of value – was it worth it? The DCS said yes because regionally authorities wanted to explore all ways of having robust challenge without the cost. The DCS, lead Member and other senior officers had been trained as peer reviewers, so the idea was that in future they could agree reciprocal arrangements for peer reviews to reduce the cost. Cllr. Watling said it had been worth it because it gave a snapshot of where we are now and what needs to be done. As lead member this was important because it meant he knows what the issues are and where to challenge the DCS. It was also helpful because it showed what we do well and where we are moving forward. Mr. Mason said it was useful to the LSCB because it shed light on activities that needed a focus that wasn’t there before, and meant that they were focussing on the right things and not just ticking boxes.

When there were no further points on the peer review, the Chair moved on to the Leaving Care Grant (LCG). He reminded members that at the last meeting they had heard Telford & Wrekin had fallen behind other authorities and the Committee had recommended lifting the grant from £1,000 to £2,000. He asked the DCS how and when a decision would be made. She explained that the budget for the LCG fell into Care & Support but accountability lay with her. She had asked the team to review the grant which they had done in consultation with the Care Council. A recommendation had been made to uplift the grant to £1,750 with a £250 emergency fund, and the scrutiny report had been considered at the same time. The increase been agreed by the Adult Leadership Team, but still had to be agreed by the CYP Leadership Team, and reported to the Senior Management Team to note the additional pressure on the budget. The DCS fully expected the recommendation to be accepted and progressed. Cllr. Ion said this was very encouraging, but as it was still at the intention stage he suggested a fuller report come back in November with the new policy and procedure and the additional information requested at, and following, the last meeting. Cllr. Green asked when the uplift would be introduced and the DCS said they were hoping to bring it in sooner rather than later. Cllr. Green asked for clarification about who paid the LCG to care leavers placed in the borough by other authorities who may decide to settle in the borough, and Cllr. Watling confirmed that Telford & Wrekin was not liable for the LCG for other authorities’ care leavers even if they are in the borough.

The Chair drew members’ attention to the Children in Care Performance Dashboard

circulated as Appendix B3 which the Committee receives on a regular basis for on-going monitoring. He said there was some good news in the report and it was encouraging to see the balance between internal and agency foster carers was moving in the right direction. Cllr. Watling also pointed out that unit costs were going in the right direction. The Chair suggested members give the report further detailed consideration and bring questions to the next meeting.

Concluding the item, the Chair thanked Cllr. Watling and the DCS.

Cllr. Turley left the meeting.

CYPSC-17 UPDATE ON MISSING CHILDREN AND RETURN INTERVIEWS

The Chair invited officers to make remarks on the report on Missing Children and Return Interviews circulated as Appendix C. In addition to the information provided in the report, the Group Manager made the following points:

- The report was in response to recommendation 2b of the Committee's report on the Children in Care Placement Strategy, and summarised progress since the presentation of the Missing Children Protocol to the Committee in January alongside a presentation from DI Shakesheff, West Mercia Police lead for missing children.
- In June DfE had issued statutory guidance on missing / runaway children and definitions of "missing" and "absent" which would be adopted by West Mercia Police from October. The police were recruiting a Missing Person Co-ordinator and there would be conversations once the person was up to speed.
- An Ofsted report had highlighted the lack of reliable missing children data collected by local authorities (a sample of 10). Telford & Wrekin had good data collection but it was being analysed by the LSCB Missing Children Sub-group (MCSG) to evaluate against Ofsted's recommendations.
- The protocol was being updated in accordance with the new DfE guidance and ACPO and Ofsted reports (and would be known as the Runaways Missing From Home and Care Protocol). The protocol would be made fit for purpose for providers from the time a child is placed with them until they left the provider's care. Other authorities have a duty to notify Telford & Wrekin when they place a child with a provider in the borough, but the expectation will be that providers also notify the Council. The providers also need to be aware of other authorities' protocols. Local practice and expectations will be discussed with providers at the conference on 9th October. The protocol will be a thick document but will be comprehensive for social workers to use.
- Until the new definitions are adopted, the police will continue to notify the Council of absent children through Family Connect who record the data. Data is shared with the Group Manager in Cohesion Services and with the police.
- The report showed data collected on Return Interviews for March-August 2013. Ten out of 41 required return interviews had not been completed. The old protocol gave social workers discretion to decide with their line manager if a return interview was needed or not. The template would record the decision (yes or no) but not the reason for the decision and the template had been adjusted to capture

this information.

Members were also given the following information in response to questions:

- Of the 87 missing episodes, there should have been 41 Return Interviews of which 10 were outstanding. Members were told that a timeline for completing return interviews had been written into the protocol so those that were overdue would be chased up and data recorded within the month of the missing episode.
- Data about the care home the child had gone missing from was not shown in the report but was captured so homes with a disproportionate number of police call outs could be identified. The MCSG was putting together a definitive data set, but we have this information. Data collection in Telford & Wrekin was good. It was captured on the Protocol database by Family Connect, the emergency duty team or other staff and shared with the police.
- There were 87 missing episodes for 71 children. There had been a reduction in the number of repeat episodes over the last 12 months.
- The 5 children “not known to this or another authority” were children who had not previously been known to social services.
- Take-up for the provider conference was good – around 80-90%. At the Chair’s request, it was agreed that members of the Committee could be invited.
- Members requested a list of the distribution of children’s care homes by ward to be provided after the meeting.

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked the officers for providing the detailed report and remarked that the service had come a long way.

Cllr. Watling and officers left the meeting.

CYPSC-18 WORK PROGRAMME AND CHAIR’S UPDATE

The Chair updated members on a number of points:

- Following the first statistical release of (provisional) Key Stage 2 results on 19th September, a summary report had been circulated as Appendix D. A detailed breakdown by school, and schools below floor standard, would come to the Committee in November along with KS4 and CCSE results. Data for looked after children was released separately in January but would also be reported to the Committee. In the meantime the Chair asked members to consider the report and come to the November meeting with questions.
- With regard to the review of primary place planning, there were three main lines of enquiry: ensuring there will be sufficient capacity; issues related to admissions and

appeals for governing bodies; the link between expansion and quality of provision. The Chair said that data and evidence gathered so far had led him to conclude that there was no “runaway train” in Telford and Wrekin, that the borough was well served in terms of pupil place planning and he had been reassured that there would be sufficient capacity.

Cllr. Aveley said he remained unconvinced there would be enough places given all the housing development and cited Wellington as an example. Mr. Atkinson said he thought the number would depend on the type of housing and was difficult to estimate. The Chair said it was important not to conflate two issues: the requirement in terms of planning additional places from birth rates and housing development, and Basic Needs capital to fund additional places created by housing development. After seeking clarity on developer levies in Telford & Wrekin, Mr. Rayner made the point that the Council relinquishing S106 money could create an issue with funding the necessary expansion from housing development because Basic Needs capital was allocated based on birth rates and not housing growth. The Chair agreed this was a big concern and a possible area for the Committee to make a recommendation.

Mr. Atkinson said it would be interesting to know more about migration and if people were moving within or from outside the borough. The Chair said this had been raised as a national issue but data he had seen so far showed this was not a challenge in Telford & Wrekin in the same way it was in other parts of the country. Cllr. Green raised concerns about mobility and inward migration clustered in geographic areas putting pressure on schools from sudden admissions as had been seen at Woodside Primary.

An additional working group meeting would be arranged to explore the issues of S106, the role of governors and heads in admissions and the issue of expansion and quality. Dates would be circulated in due course.

- The Chair reminded members that the next item for in-depth review was Youth Services including the Youth Offending Service and there would be an initial presentation at the November meeting.
- The Scrutiny Officer reminded members about the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22nd October to monitor progress on delivery of the Cost Improvement Plan and members of this Committee were invited to avoid duplication.

The meeting ended at 7.30pm.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....