

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

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2012 at 6.00 pm in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford**

**PRESENT:** Councillors M. Ion (Chair), S. Burrell, G. Green, J. Greenaway, J. Loveridge, A. Mackenzie, M. Smith, C. Turley and Co-optees R. Aveley, S. Harris, E. Ofori, S. Rayner, M. Ward.

**Attending:** L. Johnston, Director Children & Family Services; K. Perry, Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding; J. Collins, Assistant Director Education & Skills; V. McKay, Group Manager Commissioning, Procurement & Brokerage (CYP); S. Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

#### **CYPSC-7 MINUTES**

The Chairman once again thanked Sue Harris, Head Teacher of Shortwood Primary School for hosting the previous meeting, and thanked Karen Perry, Viv McKay and Maria White for providing reports and information for members at the meeting.

Reviewing the minutes of 18<sup>th</sup> September, Cllr. Greenaway asked for a breakdown of residential providers in the regional contract framework by tier.

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

#### **CYPSC-8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Co-optees A. Atkinson and S. Ali; Cabinet Member Cllr. Paul Watling. Cllrs. Burrell and Greenaway were only able to attend part of the meeting due to a conflicting group meeting.

#### **CYPSC-9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **CYPSC-10 CHILDREN IN CARE PLACEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded members that the role of the Committee was to scrutinise the outcomes and impact of policies and procedures and not the operational systems which were up to officers to determine. He also reminded members of the Committee's agreed objectives for the review of the Children in Care Placement Strategy which were about the **safety** of children and young people in care, the **value for money** of placements and the Council's responsibility, if any, for children placed in the borough by other authorities. The focus of this item was to scrutinise costs - how money is allocated and whether spending offers best value for money. The Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding was invited to summarise the key points of the Children in Care Monthly Performance Dashboard circulated as Appendix B, and the

following points were highlighted:

- The key message was the high cost of residential placements which accounted for half of the placement budget for 43 placements.
- The number of children in care had risen to 303 at the end of September, and 306 at the end of October.
- The report showed cessations from April-September 2012, but it was too early to make comparisons with the previous year's data as the position can change quickly.
- Placement types showed that over the previous year the number of children placed for adoption had fluctuated between 12 and 19; kinship care had risen then fallen; agency foster care was similar to the same point as last year but internal foster care placements had increased which was good because the cost was lower and internal foster carers were more likely to be local; there was an overall increase in the number of residential care placements and a decrease in the number of children placed with parents.
- Unit costs had decreased due to the placement mix and commissioning strategy which had reduced the average weekly unit cost of residential placements.
- Total projected placement costs had dipped in July but then risen; residential and external fostering remained significantly over budget; internal foster care and relative care remained over budget but by a relatively small margin.
- Narrative in the report described a range of activity to reduce costs:
  - Family Connect was showing early indications of impact by diverting less complex cases away from the safeguarding service, freeing up resource to focus support on children needing interventions so they are less likely to need a care plan;
  - Commissioning and procurement would be reported in more detail later in the meeting;
  - A new model for Child Protection conferences had been developed to focus more on the child's experience particularly in cases of neglect;
  - There was to be even greater emphasis on getting children safely out of care through the work of the Permanence Panel (e.g. back home, adoption, family carer);
  - The allowance for internal foster carers had been increased to improve competitiveness, the response to enquiries had been improved to speed up the approval process and recruitment activity was bringing in promising enquiries, particularly from the weekly stall in the town centre.

There was a lengthy discussion about the costs of care placements, during which the Group Commissioning Manager tabled a report describing how efficiencies were being driven out through the commissioning strategy. The Council was part of the West Midlands Commissioning Partnership which had set up collaborative framework contracts for agency foster care (from April 2011) and residential care (from May 2012). Staffordshire and Worcestershire authorities had led the work with support from the West Midlands Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership. It was difficult to calculate exact savings as children move in and out of placements and through age fee bands and changing arrangements, but the full year effect of the foster care framework contract had been analysed and assessed as being over £100,000 based on the transfer of existing placements to the new framework and the estimated cost of

new placements that would have been made under the old arrangements. A breakdown of the analysis was shown in Appendix 1 of the report. The residential contract set up in May was relatively new but had already resulted in price reductions. Sixteen placements had moved to the new contract arrangements resulting in an immediate saving of £3,979 per week, equating to £175,000 p.a. assuming the children remained in the same placement. It was expected that further discounts would be applied where a number of children were placed with one provider.

During the discussion, members explored a number of issues:

- Members questioned the differential between the average unit cost of internal (£272p.w.) and agency (£806p.w.) foster carers - almost three times as much. The Assistant Director explained that the differential was not as great as it appeared from the figures presented because the internal foster care cost did not take account of staff costs. As well as Fees and allowances paid to the foster carers (the allowances vary according to the age and needs of the child)
  - The true cost would include:
    - The cost of the fostering social workers (i.e. social workers supporting the carer). This would include costs of recruitment, training, salaries, support, overheads etc.
- The cost of external foster care includes the total agency costs. This would include:
- The fees and allowances paid by the agency to the foster carer
  - The fostering social workers (to support the carers) employed by the agency (not the Council)
  - The agency overheads and fees.
- It was difficult to calculate the true cost of internal foster care, but work had started on doing this and would be factored into the costs presented on the Dashboard in future. True cost was likely to be considerably less than £600p.w. meaning the differential between internal and external foster care was more realistically well over £200pw. Mr. Reynolds asked whether the unit cost for Relative/Friend Carers included on-costs, and the Assistant Director said that it did not and this needed to be factored in, although costs were generally lower because the cohort tended to be from younger age groups.
- Members wanted to know when the external foster care framework contract would be re-tendered and whether the cost of procurement had been factored into the unit costs. The framework contract had been set up in April 2011 for three years. The cost of procurement was minimal because Staffordshire Council had led the exercise so procurement and transaction costs had not been factored in.
  - Members asked about the reasons for needing residential care and the balance between foster and residential care. The Assistant Director said that the number placed with agency foster carers had remained static over the last year, while the number placed with internal foster carers had increased. In the last three months, all placements had been with internal foster carers and there was a need to keep recruiting. However there were some children whose needs are just too complex for a foster carer and needed residential care. Sometimes a child could be placed in foster care but their behaviour deteriorates and efforts were made to put support around the foster carer to prevent the breakdown of the placement. The Assistant Director agreed with the Chairman that there would always be a need for

residential care for some children but efforts were being made to reduce the numbers.

- There was a lengthy discussion about the costs of residential care which at £3000pw for 43 children accounted for almost half the budget. Members wanted to know why the cost was so high and whether it would be cheaper for the Council to have its own home in the borough. Members were told:
  - Care homes are tightly regulated by Ofsted and must comply with the regulatory framework and minimum ratios of staff. Once void rates are factored in, the costs are high, but efforts were being made to reduce costs.
  - Detailed costings had been done for a Council owned care home. Costs involved property, a registered manager, regulation 33 inspections, registration of the home, staff 24/7, other one-to-one support, transport, education etc. The estimated cost was £2,700 per week per child which was not significantly lower than the current residential care costs. Voids also need to be factored in. A small home may not be able to accommodate the mix of young people needing residential care, for example a vulnerable young woman could not be placed with a young man exhibiting inappropriate sexual behaviour and risk has to be factored in.
  - The Chairman asked for assurances that the children in external residential care could not be provided for better within the borough and the Assistant Director assured him that this was the case. The Assistant Director meets managers every few weeks to review residential placements to make sure the children are safe and making progress. When children are ready they are moved into foster care, but those with very complex needs can remain in residential care for a long time because their care needs to be stabilised. The reviews also check that health contributions are claimed where appropriate.
  - A member pressed the point that the West Midlands authorities should use their collective bargaining power harder and felt that there must be more that could be done. Officers said that this was what the procurement exercise had been about and that the 13 authorities involved had used their buying power to negotiate better prices. There were 144 residential providers on the 2 year framework contract – this would be monitored and evaluated to identify where costs could be driven down further. Work with providers would continue through Provider Forum meetings. A meeting had also been arranged with a not-for-profit provider to find out more about their business model.
  - The cheapest provider on the framework in the borough cost £2,095 per week but the cheapest was not always the best. Providers had been evaluated on a 60% price 40% quality basis, and the tier one providers were always searched first for vacancies. A member questioned whether the quality of provision had been compromised for lower prices but was told that in fact the procurement exercise had enhanced the quality assurance checks.
  - The Chairman was given firm assurance that the costs of external care had come down due to the framework contracts.

- There was a discussion about the budget overspend. Members wanted to know why the gap between forecast and budget was so significant (£10m allocated in April was overspent by £1.5m) and why there is a consistent year-on-year overspend which cannot be accounted for by the variations in numbers. Members were informed:
  - Although the number of children in care had been relatively stable over the last 12 months it had increased by around 50 in the last 5 years. The lowest number in 2010/11 was 264. Decisions made today could have a long-term impact on the budget – for example a child placed in residential care may continue there until age 16-18. The costs are modelled through so if the budget is overspent at year end one year it is likely to be overspent going forward.
  - The budget position shows the need to reduce the number of residential placements – replacing 10 residential placements to other types of placement would save around £1m per year. A lot of new ideas were being looked at to help for example the use of Jigsaw, recruiting super foster-carers as Council staff, putting in place a Support Panel to look at non-emergency, edge of care cases to put wrap around support in place to prevent children needing to be taken into care. Asked what work is done with parents when their children are in care, the Assistant Director explained that preventative support is provided to parents before children are taken into care, and a lot of work is done with parents with children in care to try and get children safely home. Different approaches were being tried in cases of domestic abuse or neglect though an interim support initiative.
  - Asked whether she felt the budget was realistic, the Assistant Director replied that it was not realistic in terms of being achieved by the end of the year and the overspend would carry over to 2013/14 but she was working closely with the Assistant Director Family & Cohesion Services on a cost improvement plan to improving value for money and reduce costs - for example to prevent repeated care.
- The Chairman asked how Telford & Wrekin compared to other authorities and whether overspend was a national issue. The Director of Children & Family Services said that the Association of Directors of Children's Services had just produced its third report on Safeguarding Pressures which showed a mixed picture – 60% of authorities had rising costs and 40% were reducing, but the reasons for this needed to be unpicked. Some authorities had invested heavily in early intervention which was the route Telford & Wrekin had gone down but more work was needed to understand the correlations and reasons. This was something that could come back to scrutiny. The Assistant Director said that some authorities had found innovative solutions – for example Reading had done a lot of work on stopping baby after bay being repeatedly removed into care from the same parents – and these ideas were being looked at. Only one authority in the West Midlands had reduced the number of children coming into care but they had been rated by Ofsted as inadequate. Cllr. Mackenzie was concerned about the potential consequences of not taking a child into care – the Assistant Director said that historically there had been a tendency to keep children on protection plans for too

long and there was a need to draw a balance so that the right children were brought into care.

## **CYPSC-11 OFSTED ACTION PLAN**

The Chairman reminded members that a further meeting would be held in December to review the Children's Services Improvement Plan in detail and this item was to receive an interim update on progress to date.

The Director of Children & Family Services (DCFS) said that the Senior Leadership Team, led by the Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding, had been developing an integrated Children's Services Improvement Plan in response to the Ofsted report and recommendations. The Assistant Director (AD) explained that the plan was work in progress. Not all the Ofsted recommendations were for the Council and a workshop was being held on 15<sup>th</sup> November to integrate health actions. The AD briefed members on the report circulated as Appendix C which showed progress against recommendations for immediate (i.e. by 10/08/21) and 3 month (i.e. by 10/11/12) action. The briefing focussed on the steps taken in safeguarding to rectify issues requiring immediate action as these were of most urgent concern. The issues related to the safeguarding duty desk taking too long to gather information and process or record decisions. Decisions about referrals or care orders should be made within 24 hours which was not always happening and this practice was considered by Ofsted to be unsafe.

An additional report was tabled to show the impact of the immediate steps taken on the number and percentage of completed contacts, referrals and Section 47 visits within the 24 hour guideline monitored on a weekly basis between 27/08/12 and 08/10/12.

The report showed:

- Contacts completed within 24 hours (i.e. calls from families or professionals to Family Connect) had shown steady progress from 91.26% to 100%.
- Referrals completed within 24 hours (i.e. where the social worker had decided more support is needed than just advice) had improved from 60.41% to 82%. The remaining 18% had been completed within 2-5 days. There was sometimes a good reason for not sending in a social worker within 24 hours unless the child is in immediate danger, for example if the health visitor was not contactable that day and it was better to wait to get information from someone who knew the child which might mean a visit by a SW was not necessary and the AD was confident that these cases were justifiable.
- Strategy meetings and Section 47 visits (a single agency or joint visit with the police where there is a child protection enquiry – if necessary a child protection conference is held within 15 days of the last strategy meeting) completed within 24 hours had improved from 50% to 100% for the three weeks from 23/09/12 to 08/10/12.

The data showed a much better and a more timely response to children which had been recommended by Ofsted, and the weekly monitoring meant the data could be interrogated to analyse the reasons for any dips in performance. There had been a

dip across the board w/c 03.09.23 which was the first week of the school term and there had been sickness in the team and the detailed analysis enabled contingencies to be planned for similar circumstances.

There was one recommendation (Ensure that all looked after children have a qualified social worker and that the minimum statutory visiting requirements are complied with) which would not be met by the three month target. This could have been rectified by bringing in agency social workers, but the non-qualified case workers had been working with the children for a long time and it was felt that it was not in the children's interest to suddenly disrupt their relationship with their caseworker and a longer term solution was being found that was better for the children.

The Chairman commented that progress was very encouraging. There were then a number of questions.

- Cllr. Greenaway had left the meeting at 6.30 but a question was tabled on her behalf about the position on providing partner agencies with a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of the community social work team where the original hope had been to produce a draft report by the end of October. The relevant manager had considered this but it was necessary to look at the role of the social workers across the whole system so early intervention and edge of care could be brought together.
- The Chairman questioned the issue of statutory visits for out of borough children – members had received assurances at the last meeting that these happened. The AD assured members that the visits were happening. The data did not always show 100% of statutory visits completed but this was thought to be an issue with a time lag in the recording system rather than the duty was not being met. A piece of work was being done to separate the children in Telford & Wrekin from those outside the borough to ensure the service is not diminished. The DCFS said that the AD had focussed on the quality of visits and that they were not just about timing.
- Members wanted to know why there were children without a qualified social worker and whether it was because it was difficult to recruit qualified social workers. This was a historic issue – in the past there had been not been a requirement for all caseworkers to be qualified social workers but this now needed to change. A lot of work had been done to recruit qualified social workers or to train and qualify internal staff. The number of social work vacancies had reduced significantly – there were 10 currently 10 vacancies from a cohort of over 70. The future looked positive with high quality trainees coming through the national “Step up to Social Work” fast-track graduate programme who would be graduating in August. There were also some very good candidates with rich backgrounds and depth of experience coming through the “Return to Social Work” campaign. Professional fees for practising social workers had gone up to £192 for 2 years but this was not a barrier to entry because the Council funded the fee.
- Mrs. Ward asked for more information about the contingency for sickness cover for the Safeguarding Advisors Team. The plan is for social workers from other parts of the service move into the team temporarily. Previous delays were not just an

issue about the availability of social workers but the process of authorisation by managers.

The Chairman thanked officers for attending the meeting and providing reports and information to the Committee and officers left the meeting. The Chairman reminded members that the sub-group would meet on 9<sup>th</sup> November to consider the information provided to date as part of the review of Children in Care Placements to identify further work that needed to be done and to start to formulate a report and recommendations which would be considered by the Committee next year.

## **CYPSC-12 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

The Assistant Director Education & Skills presented reports on the 2012 Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 4 (KS4) results for the borough and for children in care. The information was from the first statistical release and the data would not be validated until December. These showed:

- KS2 results showed an upward trend from 2011 with notable improvements in English and Maths. The assessment of writing skills had changed making the results not directly comparable with previous years. There had been improvements at Level 4+ (pupils expected to attain the benchmark results) and Level 5 (higher attaining pupils) in English, Maths and English & Maths combined and against national averages. Details of the increases were provided in the report.
- There were no schools below floor standard at KS2 in 2012 which was a marked improvement on last year when 4 had fallen below. Intervention packages had been put into those schools and they had shown significant improvement.
- There was an improving trajectory at KS4 with 60.7% in Telford & Wrekin achieving 5 or more A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and Maths compared to an average of 58.4% in the all England state funded sector. The report showed Telford & Wrekin performing well overall against statistical neighbours, West Midlands and all England averages.
- The floor standard at KS4 had risen in consecutive years from 30% to 35% to 40%. In 2012 there was only one school which had fallen below floor standard due to GCSE English results being 7% lower than expected (38% against an expected 45%).
- There were 9 looked after children in the 2012 KS2 cohort. The results were lower than the Telford & Wrekin averages (L4+ English 66.7%, L4+ Maths 63.6%). Results can fluctuate significantly because of the small numbers in each cohort. Nationally children in care perform lower than national averages, but the key concern is to close the gap.
- The 2012 KS4 results for children in care in Telford & Wrekin were shown in the report. 35.7% had achieved the national benchmark (5 or more A\*-C GCSEs

including English and Maths) which was considered very good although was largely attributed to the particular cohort many of whom had not experienced disruptions in their education or placement breakdown and had remained engaged with education. However, the results were still below the Telford & Wrekin average and again highlighted the need to close the gap. The 2012 national averages for children in care would not be published until December but would be reported to the Committee.

- Ofsted had changed the rating framework. The old categories were Outstanding, Good or Satisfactory with sub-categories Notice to Improve or Special Measures. The Satisfactory rating had been replaced by Requires Improvement, also with the sub-categories. The standards required to achieve each grade had also been lifted. Since 1<sup>st</sup> September, 5 primary schools had been inspected by Ofsted under the new framework. Three had been rated Good, two had been rated as Requires Improvement. At secondary level, Lord Silkin had achieved Good or above in all categories which was cause for celebration.

The Chairman commented that there was much to celebrate in the results and hoped the encouraging picture would continue into future years. Members asked a number of questions and were given the following information:

- In terms of reasons for the improving picture, schools seemed to be feeling the pressure and responding to national strategies. The Learning Partnership enabled Head Teachers to share good practice, learn and apply lessons from each other there seemed to be a real collective desire to see school improvement right across the borough.
- There was no geographical concentration of schools below floor standard at KS2 in 2011. 2 were in the south, one was central and one in Wellington.
- Asked whether support for looked after children is equal across all schools, it was hoped there was no disparity as all schools had a designated teachers and governor for looked after children supported by regional network meetings. However Ofsted had found that the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) which are a statutory requirement for children in care were too variable. More recent plans tended to be tighter and better quality but some needed to be sharpened up.
- Regarding the English GCSE results, one school had been affected by the change to the assessment standard and had dropped 4% on expected results but a number of the pupils were doing re-sits and it was hoped the results would lift the average up to over 50%.
- Members wanted to know why 6 of the children in care had not achieved any GCSEs at all. The AD agreed that this was not good, but compared to the national performance for children in care this number would be expected to be higher. There can be several reasons for pupils getting no qualifications – for example young people unable to attend school because they are in the criminal justice system or pregnant, children in special schools or if a young person has moved

schools and not been entered for exams. This is monitored and care placement plans have an education plan running alongside to minimise disruption to education. In terms of follow-up support, these children remain under the transition team so they have the support of a key worker to help them look at college courses or employment routes. They also keep their PEP which is tailored through. If a young person leaves care at 16 and chooses to move away they do not continue to receive support.

The Chairman requested a breakdown of KS4 results for children in care in Telford & Wrekin schools and outside the borough, and a breakdown of average performance by gender.

**CYPSC-13 WORK PROGRAMME**

The next meeting would be on 11<sup>th</sup> December to review the Children's Service Improvement Plan in detail.

The meeting ended at 8.05 pm.

**Chairman:**.....

**Date:**.....