

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 6 February 2018 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room G3/4, Addenbrook House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT 7

Present: Councillors S Barnes, E A Clare, J A Francis, E J Greenaway and co-optees Mel Ward, Lynn Fowler.

Also Present: Lead Cabinet Member for Children & Adults Early Help & Support – Paul Watling; Independent Chair of the T&W Safeguarding Children Board – Andrew Mason, Clive Jones: Director of Children’s and Adult Services- TWC, J Tangye, Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer - TWC.

CYPSC-09 Apologies for Absence

Cllrs Kevin Guy, Janice Jones, Jane Pinter and Hilda Rhodes, Co-optees Carolyn Healy, Carol Morgan.

In the Chair’s absence, Cllr Joy Francis was nominated as Chair for the meeting.

CYPSC-10 Declarations of Interest

None

CYPSC-11 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2017

The Minutes of the meeting were approved as an accurate record with one amendment to include Cllr Karen Tomlinson, who was in attendance for the meeting.

CYPSC-12 Getting to Good - Children and Family Services Improvement Plan

PROGRESS UPDATE REGARDING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOLLOWING OFSTED SIF JUNE - JULY 2016

The Chair introduced the item for the Committee to consider the action plan one year on addressing the recommendations from the Ofsted single inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (SIF), which took place between 13 June and 7 July 2016, with the report published on 26 August 2016. The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Adult and Children’s Early Help and Support, the Director of Adult and Children’s Services and the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board. Apologies were given for the Assistant Director, Children’s Safeguarding.

The Council had met with Ofsted twice since the report in July 2016 and positive feedback had been received from the inspector. 11 recommendations had been received which was a low number compared to some Councils across the country. The Council’s Action Plan addressing the recommendations, had been approved by Ofsted and the majority of actions had now been completed. The Committee was reassured that the impact of the actions

continued to be monitored and that increased levels of training and resource had been implemented.

It was highlighted that standards continued to be upheld through initiatives such as a regional improvement scheme which was conducted by annual self-evaluation and monitored by region. Peer assessment had taken place with colleagues from Herefordshire which included services being challenged along identified lines of enquiry; demonstrating that performance was continually scrutinised. A new framework had come into force from January 2018 which involved a two week inspection that would take place at some point between January 2019 and December 2019. Members noted that the new framework differed by including areas of focus that had not previously been covered. There would be increased reference to areas such as vulnerable children who were not in school, children tutored at home, managed moves; and care leavers - the care leaver offer, to ensure Local Authorities were undertaking their corporate parenting responsibility with the support of partner organisations. Prior to inspection there may be two focussed inspections lasting two days (area for focus agreed with Ofsted) or one focussed inspection and one joint targeted area inspection likely to be CSE, neglect or domestic violence. The Committee noted that greater emphasis was being placed by the Council on taking into account the views of young people.

The Council's approach to continuous improvement was being supported through partnership with the Safeguarding Children Board. New multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding were in place that required a robust inspection regime in order to ensure there was consistency across the agencies. The input of the SCB enabled triangulation of evidence for the Cabinet Member and Senior Officers on a regular basis.

Members raised the following questions on the T&W Getting to Good Improvement Plan: A general question was raised about the lack detail against the actions when compared with the same Improvement Plan which had clear targets presented to the Committee in January 2017. It was noted that as the actions were now mostly completed and success measures achieved, there was no longer a need for actions. Impact was constantly measured as part of ongoing performance monitoring. The Director of Children's and Adult Services suggested that the Committee might consider looking at aspects of the performance dashboard at the next meeting which showed performance against some of the actions within the plan.

It was noted that the Council's duty to provide an independent visitor service had fallen from 100% to 90% due to a change in commissioning arrangements but the Council was working towards the target.

Members probed into the issue of children being educated at home and were concerned that there may be a trend. It was noted that some children were home educated for religious reasons, but an Officer would always assess whether the standard of education was acceptable and the national curriculum was being met. This was an important area of focus for the Council; to establish why home education was popular and to work with the schools to avoid it where possible and appropriate. In a results driven school culture, one concern was that some schools were acting illegally by encouraging home tutoring for the wrong reasons, however, the Council acted immediately where this was found to be the case. It was also noted that exclusions were a worrying national trend.

A question was raised on the issue of file audit scores as this had been marked as an area for improvement. An explanation was sought on what this meant.

It was noted that file audits were done across Children's services. Cases were considered by the Cabinet Member and the Service Director to judge how well things had been done and to identify areas for improvement which were then discussed with individual care workers. There was a responsibility for file audits across the organisation which entailed randomly selected files and where areas for improvement were identified, these would be shared with all relevant partners. There were also some case files selected on the priorities set by the SCB. The Cabinet Member acknowledged there were no barriers to files that he wanted to audit, it was an open culture with emphasis on continuous improvement.

A question was raised on IRO numbers and it was reported that the Council had been below recommended numbers. The SCB had some concerns a year ago but were now assured of progress. It was noted that there had been a temporary experienced social work manager had been recruited. They have now been replaced by a permanent appointment. This position was a crucial role in listening to families and their children, challenging the individual social workers and the partner agencies. Management oversight had been improved. Ofsted had provided guidance on this and it was acknowledged that more staff had been recruited as a result.

The Committee noted that work was being informed by the Care Council ('VOICE'), to change the way CiC Reviews were delivered and to improve participation of children and young people. It was noted that the Rights and Representations Team had successfully implemented an ongoing awareness raising program with social work teams and children and young people in care. The Cabinet Member reported that the team was very visible to children and young people; they reached out to all new children and young people as they came into care and there was no barrier to access. The team attended all team meetings to provide advice about the service they offered, and also about the jointly commissioned Independent Visitor Service.

Members asked about children and young people that did not readily interact and how their needs were being met by the service. It was noted that one of the actions in the improvement plan was to implement a more comprehensive case management system that would enable all children in care to have a conversation with a social worker, IRO or the Rights and Representation Team. This was due to be implemented later in 2018.

The Committee noted that a new partnership with Staffordshire, Stoke and Shropshire would be looking at long term fostering as well as adoption. The Council had a good track record in successful adoption where breakdowns in the adoption were rare. Telford & Wrekin' performance for adoptions was one of the best nationally. This was a different way of looking at adoption/long term fostering. The new model would look at fostering to adoption – something that had been difficult to achieve but it was one of the best ways of ensuring children had a smooth way into a permanent home. Fostering to adoption places were coming forwards.

Members noted that major improvements had been made in the arrangements for privately fostered children. A project team had been set up to improve management arrangements and oversee the improvement requirements, and a part time lead officer had been identified to monitor the implementation of the project plan. Furthermore, a range of awareness

raising activities had been delivered with members of the public, partner agencies and internal staff. This area had been recommended to the Council and the SCB for improvement by Ofsted. Members asked how long the private fostering monthly sub-group had been established, the Service Director said that he would be able to clarify this after the meeting.

Members asked about the ongoing work to review and strengthen the sufficiency strategy to increase the range of accommodation available for 16-18 year olds and care leavers, as had been recommended by Ofsted. Members felt that it was important to extend the offer of accommodation to incorporate advice and guidance on basic living such as how to understand bills, to budget and access benefits as well as everyday tasks such as cooking, ironing, shopping. The Cabinet Member reported that Ofsted had agreed that the Council was doing the best it could for care leavers, going over and above what was required. Bed and Breakfast accommodation was only allocated in emergencies. It was noted that there were more young people this year from CiC that would be going university that even before.

A question was raised about levels of staff sickness impacting on the service. The Service Director reported that the Council did not have a particular problem with sickness. There was a focus on reducing caseloads to an average of 19 for each social worker to prevent stress and to allow capacity for further improvements in practice. Funding had been allocated to target this. There were incentives to encourage good social workers to stay in post and to attract newly qualified social workers such as golden hellos. The Council's agency figures were low compared to neighbouring authorities, however, it was acknowledged that when cover was needed it had to come through agency staff. The Cabinet Member and Senior Officers met regularly to look at this area. The Council was in dialogue with central Government on a prospective proposal to set up a West Midlands Social Work Academy to train existing social workers in best practice.

A question was raised about peer group supervision and it was reported that this was in place, the Council were moving to a model of 'pod' or group supervision of cases which had been shown to achieve good outcomes for cases as well as taking the burden of individual social workers.

Cllr Kevin Guy had raised question in advance of the meeting that the Service Director acknowledged and responded to; that if Ofsted were to visit tomorrow, he would be satisfied that the Council was in a good position in terms of all 11 recommendations raised last time. The Cabinet Member reinforced that the Council was in a much stronger position now than in previous years.

The Cabinet Member, Service Director and Director of the Safeguarding Children Board were thanked for their responses and it was agreed that the Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding would be asked to provide an update and presentation to the Committee at the next meeting - 10th April, on the performance dashboard, including the Ofsted areas of improvement and targets, and some information on how case file audits were measured/performance indicators.

Members suggested that the format of the information provided did not enable them to scrutinise effectively as current performance could not be judged against any markers. The Committee agreed that updates in previous years had been in the form of graphs and the performance dashboard which provided a clearer picture and they were keen to receive

updates in this format again, as had been suggested by the Service Director earlier in the meeting.

The Officers left the meeting at 18.54pm

CYPSC-08 Chair's Update

The Chair asked Members to confirm that they had agreed with the Committee's response to support the School Organisation Plan as per the Minutes of the meeting 3 July and the 12 September 2017 and the informal meeting held on 10 October 2017. Members commented that there had been no recommendations for the Committee to agree and that there remained issues that were ward specific.

The Committee had followed the Work Programme and had retained the final meeting of the Municipal year for any issues that had arisen. It was agreed that with the Children Services performance dashboard would be circulated as per Clive Jones' offer and at this point the Members would decide whether it would be useful to receive a presentation from the Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding. It was noted that information on youth unemployment and NEETS was yet to be circulated for the Committee to monitor and raise any concerns where necessary; and that education attainment would continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis.

The Chair raised a concern about one outstanding action from the meeting on 12 September – the informal meeting with the CATE team which had yet to happen. Members agreed that this should be followed up forthwith.

The meeting ended at 7.45pm

Chairman:

Date: