

## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 16 March 2015 at 6.00pm in Meeting Rooms G3/G4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford.**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs K R Guy (Chair), G M Green, J Loveridge, J Pinter, and R G Scammell and Co-optees: Mr S Ali and Mr S Rayner

**ALSO PRESENT:** Cllr P R Watling (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families)

**IN ATTENDANCE :** F Bottrill (Scrutiny Group Specialist, Telford & Wrekin Council); Laura Johnston (Director of Children & Family Services – Telford & Wrekin Council); B Longmore (Police and Crime Commissioner); D Moseley (Scrutiny Officer, Telford & Wrekin Council); L Noakes (Assistant Director: Health, Well-Being & Public Protection and Statutory Director of Public Health); and K Perry (Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services).

#### **CYPSC-26 WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS**

The Chair reminded everyone present that in accordance with the Council's protocols, the meeting could be filmed or recorded but that any footage must focus on the Committee Members and not include the public gallery.

The Chair reminded the Committee of the scope and purpose of the meeting.

#### **CYPSC-27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllrs A A Mackenzie and C R Turley & Mr A Atkinson and Ms M Ward (Co-optees);

#### **CYPSC-28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **CYPSC-29 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF MULTI AGENCY WORKING AGAINST CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)**

**Evidence of the Police and Crime Commissioner – Mr Bill Longmore**

By way of introduction, the Commissioner explained his role as an elected official tasked with ensuring the West Mercia Police Force was providing a good service and performing well. Any complaints regarding the Force were dealt with by his office. A key element of his plans for more effective working in the Force Area was to create partnerships with other agencies and this had so far been successful. He noted that himself and the Deputy Commissioner had been very pleased with the partnership response from agencies in Telford and the efforts made to work together.

The Chair asked the Commissioner to provide an overview of the approach of West Mercia Police to tackling CSE. The Commissioner responded that at the time of his

election, the cases subject to Operation Chalice were just going to Court. He had been surprised at the scale of offending and that it had been able to go on for so long without censure. He felt the Operation had been a wake up call for the Force and he had taken this on board and, following discussions with the Chief Constable regarding resources, considerable additional resource had been put in to this area. Additionally, media coverage of Operation Yewtree (the Metropolitan Police investigation of sexual abuse allegations against the British media personality Jimmy Savile and others) had resulted in a general increase in the reporting of abuse and this had to be properly resourced.

The Chair indicated that representatives of West Mercia Police had indicated at the Inquiry Day that additional resource of 16 officers and 5 Barnado's workers had been identified and he asked whether this resource was specific to Telford. The Commissioner advised that underspent budgets had been re-allocated to fund 27 officers and the allocation of that resource was the remit of the Chief Constable. Officers were not designated to a specific area but were allocated as need was identified and, therefore, if the Force had indicated 16 officers in Telford that was likely to be correct.

The Chair asked whether the Commissioner was satisfied that West Mercia Police co-ordinated well with other organisations and the Commissioner stated that good working relationships existed with partners across the Force Area. Officers were very dedicated and the issue of CSE was one that was 'close to home' due to the experience of Operation Chalice so awareness was very high. He was confident that Officers were looking for the signs that CSE may be happening and were working hard in this regard. The Commissioner had implemented some areas for improvement around the provision of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in schools in order to ensure that they were appropriately trained to deal with a complex environment and the Chief Constable had undertaken a check of training and provided PCSOs with a report setting out the types of issues they should look out for in order that they were better equipped. The Commissioner had not spoken to PCSOs locally but could confirm that in other areas of the Force, they were very dedicated to their work in schools and were a big weapon in the fight against CSE, reaching children at a grassroots level, being easily approachable. There were 35 PCSOs in schools across West Mercia and the Commissioner had no intentions to reduce this budget. He would, however, continue to monitor their effectiveness and that they were well equipped to do the job.

The Chair noted that during consultation on the Terms of Reference, questions had been raised about organisations' confidence in staff training and resources. The Commissioner advised that experienced officers dealt with cases of CSE and that he was keen to ensure that all officers entering the force were aware of the issue. Drawing on his own experience in the Force, the Commissioner attended all new officer inductions courses and made a point of explaining to inductees that they may encounter this crime and highlighted the signs to look for, so that awareness was there from the point of induction, rather than waiting for the topic to be covered in the general training syllabus.

Cllr R G Scammell noted the Commissioner had provided funding to support the provision of additional officers but, with increasing government cuts, could he

guarantee that this support would be ongoing? The Commissioner indicated that the resource was there for two years. CSE was now a strategic priority and the Police and Crime Panel were very aware that resources were needed to mount an effective fight against this crime. He, therefore, felt it would be foolish not to try to ensure that the money remained available.

Cllr R G Scammell asked whether the Force liaised with neighbouring Forces. The Commissioner reminded the Committee that his role was non-operational but he could assure the Committee that inter-force liaison took place and was firmly on the agenda; appropriate technology to support this was being implemented.

Cllr G M Green, noted that children were gaining access to internet technologies at a much younger age and asked whether PCSOs were installed in secondary schools or primary schools? The Commissioner noted that placement was more likely in secondary schools because these children made greater use of technology. However, if Members were minded to make recommendations which supported a PCSO presence in primary schools, he would be willing to consider it.

Cllr J Loveridge noted that discussions at the Inquiry Day on 13 March had included sharing data, information and intelligence to tackle CSE. She asked whether the Commissioner considered that sufficient systems were in place to ensure information was shared to inform the understanding of the scale of CSE and the development of the CSE strategy? The Commissioner responded that technology was in place but he did not know whether it had capacity to accurately record the scale of CSE. There was a lot of technology available and there were sufficient funds to ensure procurement of the best technologies but installations did not occur overnight – the introduction of new technology could take up to 12 months. He also reiterated that, in the wake of Operation Yewtree, there was greater confidence among the public to report issues so records would be increasing.

The Chair asked whether the Commissioner was confident that West Mercia Police supported victims through disclosure and the court system. The Commissioner advised that commissioning of Victim Services had recently become part of his remit. A Victim Services Officer had been appointed and this had increased value for money. He had also doubled the budget of the Grant Fund to £2m - Axis Counselling and Psychotherapy, who provided Independent Sexual Violence Advisory (ISVA) services locally, had received an award of £118K in the previous year and this would be likely to be made again in the current year. He had also increased the precept in order to support the prevention of crime and rehabilitation so more money than ever was available. He considered prevention to be the best way forward.

The Chair asked the Commissioner whether there were any areas which he thought the Committee should explore with the other organisations participating in the review. The Commissioner considered that the Committee could investigate the potential to create closer working relationships across the whole of the Force area. He considered that partners across Telford and Wrekin worked well but this could be expanded into closer working with colleagues in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Mr S Rayner asked how the voice of victims informed policy and practice. The Commissioner responded that victims must always be the first consideration. He advised that any complaints were properly investigated. He was confident that victims were considered in prosecution cases although he felt that in cases where victims spoke English as a second language, better relationships could be built as mothers from minority communities could be isolated and unable to report crime. He was making efforts to bring these communities together and there were funds available to further understanding in these communities and create closer working relationships with the Police.

The Chair noted that Police Representatives attending the Inquiry Day had considered that legislation was sufficient to enable them to properly prosecute crimes of CSE and he asked whether the Commissioner agreed with this view. The Commissioner did not believe there were any weaknesses in the legislation. He felt that if evidence was gathered properly, the police could secure convictions. He was not aware of loopholes which could be exploited.

The Chair asked whether the Commissioner was aware of concerns about trafficking in the local area. The Commissioner advised that he had received a report from the Street Pastors who had been monitoring suspicious vehicular activity (eg cruising around) and taking licence plates. He was pleased to note that due to the vigilance of the Street Pastors, when he received the latest report, prevalence of this type of activity had declined. He felt, therefore, that there remained potential for trafficking and CSE but that local preventative activity was having a big impact.

The Chair thanked the Police and Crime Commissioner for attending the meeting.

#### Evidence of the Local Authority

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, the Director for Children's Services, the Assistant Director: Health, Well-Being & Public Protection and Statutory Director of Public Health, and the Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services. He asked them to introduce themselves and their role in relation to tackling CSE.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families explained that his role was as the political voice for Children's Services in the Council. This included all children and young people's services, preventative work, education and everything in between. He had a weekly meeting with the Director of Children's Services.

The Director of Children's Services explained that she was accountable for the management and performance of children's services in Telford and Wrekin which included child protection and tackling CSE. Her role also included leading and promoting partnerships with other organisations and she had a role on the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

The Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services said that she was the Council's Assistant Director with responsibility for CSE and she chaired the multi-agency strategic CSE group.

Assistant Director: Health, Well-Being & Public Protection explained that the services she was responsible for include Licensing. She was a member of the LSCB and a member of the Strategic CSE Group.

The Chair asked how well was Telford and Wrekin Council working with other organisations?

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families said that he was an observer member of the LSCB and had worked to tackle CSE over the last 4 years. He said that the partnership approach to tackling CSE in Telford and Wrekin was very positive. He explained that when he was elected one of the first meetings he attended was the Gold Group for Operation Chalice. Through this work the Council and other organisations had developed services and this work had now been mainstreamed and within the Council was part of Cohesion Services. He explained that it was his view that CSE was an issue for society and that all agencies had a role.

The Director of Children's Services said that she was proud of partnership working in Telford and Wrekin, but recognised that it was not perfect. She explained that she started in Telford and Wrekin in early 2009 and prevention of CSE was a priority then and the Council, police and health organisations came together. As Director for Children's Services she led the Silver Group as part of Operation Chalice and the development of the CSE pathway to support and protect victims. She explained that working with the LSCB has been very important and that Board held the partners to account. Since 2009 the public sector partners had been re-organised but had been able to maintain good partnership arrangements, including the Strategic CSE Group, the Operational CSE Group. In summary there was good partnership working and the partners were held to account by the LSCB.

The Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services said that she Chaired the Strategic CSE Group and other organisations put items on the agenda. An external view of the partnership working had been given by Ofsted in 2011 and 2012 which commended the partnership working in Telford and Wrekin to tackle CSE.

The Assistant Director: Health, Well-Being & Public Protection said that she was a member of the Strategic CSE Group and the public protection service had been involved in the work to tackle CSE. She explained that she joined the Local Authority relatively recently but had been impressed with the involvement of partners.

The Chair said that data sharing had been an issue that had come up in Inquiry Reports in other areas. He asked for clarification if this was working effectively from a Council perspective?

The Director of Children's Services replied that in relation to high level data there was more work to do. There was not a national dataset. The Council was working as part of the regional ADCS group (Association of Directors of Children's Services) comprising the 14 West Midlands authorities to develop benchmarking data. There was a data analyst working for West Mercia and Warwickshire Police. At an individual level data was addressed by the CATE pathway. The Council understood how its own services worked and they had been improving since 2009. The Council was

looking at data as part of the performance framework and there was a data sharing strategy.

The Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services said that there was a CSE Pathway. This set out that if a child was assessed as being at risk of CSE there was a meeting with that individual child and that was followed up as needed. The strategic and operational CSE groups enabled staff from different organisations to meet and share information. Some of this was not hard data but emerging themes. This could then be passed on to the relevant organisation eg CATE Team or Police.

The Director of Children's Services said that the Council shared data on an individual level within information governance requirements. This was part of the success of Operation Chalice.

The Chair asked if there was confidence that data at a local level and national level was robust?

The Director of Children's Services responded that there was no CSE national data set to be able to compare how well the Council was doing or the scale of the problem. The Council and police were carrying out analysis to develop this locally, but this was a work in progress.

The Chair said that health organisations has raised concern about children placed by other authorities in Telford and Wrekin and the need for better information sharing.

The Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services replied that all children in care had a social worker and it was their responsibility to ensure that relevant information was passed on. Where a child or young person was on the CSE pathway, the CATE worker would talk to other organisations.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families said that he would be more concerned about young people placed in Telford and Wrekin. The Local Authority making the placement should have a care plan, but the Council here had a duty of care.

The Director of Children's Services said that currently there was no national system for sharing data, but a new system was being developed to enable the NHS and Councils to share limited data. The Council was also working with care providers supporting Young People placed in Telford and Wrekin. If there were concerns about a young person placed in Telford and Wrekin eg if a young person went missing a lot, if the Council believed that the young person was not being kept safe, the Council could raise this with the care provider, the placing authority and Ofsted. Another way the Council could raise concerns was to write to the Assistant Director in the placing authority.

The Chair said that the CSE pathway had been explained to the Committee. It looked complicated but it was simple when it was explained. He said that the Committee would like to speak to front line staff as part of the review. This was something that Scrutiny in other areas had been criticised for not doing.

The Director of Children's Services said that staff should be aware of CSE and how to respond, enough could never be done and the strategy would be reviewed and updated; this would be under the remit of the LSCB. The Council had provided training at many levels and a session had been run for Councillors. The CATE team also delivered training for other staff.

The Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services said that managers had also been trained and this had been recognised as a business continuity issue.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families said that he listened to what officers say and had visited schools. It was important to cross reference.

The Director of Children's Services said that specific audits on CSE case records had been carried out.

The Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding & Specialist Services added that this audit looked at the quality of the records but also the understanding of the staff. If any issues were identified this was followed up.

The Chair asked for a copy of this report.

Cllr G M Green said that all members were corporate parents. Lead Members may know about CSE and what to do, but new councillors should be informed of this as part of their corporate parenting training.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families explained that there was a cross party group, but he would be wary of Councillors taking an officer's role. He agreed that the induction for new members should include CSE.

The meeting ended at 7.55pm

**Chairman:**.....

**Date:**.....