

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 1 June 2015.

PRESENT

(Mr. L. Spence in the Chair)

Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC
Mrs. C. Lewis
Mr B. Monaghan

Mr. L. J. P. O'Shea CC
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC
Mr. L. Spence CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC
Miss. H. Worman CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

That Mr. L. Spence CC be appointed Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2016.

2. Election of Deputy Chairman.

That Mrs. C. M. Radford CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2016.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 March 2015.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

5. Questions asked by Members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

6. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of Interest in respect of items on the agenda.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

Mr. B. Monaghan and Mr. G. Welsh CC declared personal interests in matters relating to schools, as they had family members who taught in Leicestershire.

Mr L. Spence CC indicated that, whilst this did not amount to an interest to be declared at this meeting, he felt it relevant to report that he sometimes worked for an academy within the County.

There were no other declarations.

8. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

10. Quarter 4 2014/15 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Children and Family Services and the Chief Executive concerning an update of Children and Family Services performance at the end of quarter 4 of 2014/15. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 10", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- i. Concern was expressed over the number of Child Protection Plan review meetings cancelled due to the lack of representation and attendance from certain partner agencies. It was known that attendance at review meetings was poor from two agencies: the Police, and a small number of Schools. The Committee was reassured that the number of review meetings that were cancelled was relatively low, and that agreement had been sought that reports submitted should be robust and detailed enough to compensate for any non-attendance from Police representatives at review meetings. Remedial action had also been taken with schools on a case by case basis.
- ii. Concern was raised over the lack of engagement that both officers and the Lead Member for Children and Family Services had with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). It was noted that the Director of Children and Family Services was, however, in regular contact with officers such as the Assistant Chief Constable, and that there was a Police representative on statutory bodies such as the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board, alongside the Lead Member and Director. This provided some opportunities for engagement.
- iii. The performance data highlighted the improving percentage rate of children attending good or outstanding schools, however performance was rated 'red' with regard to the level of progression between key stages in both English and Maths. It was explained that levels of progression in English and Maths was only one a number of key measures Ofsted used to determine the rating of a school. In addition, the performance in this area was measured annually and did not reflect in

year improvements made by schools. Evidence of in year improvement was measured internally by schools and would be provided to Ofsted during an inspection.

- iv. The performance of the fostering and adoption team had improved year on year in relation to the timeliness of placements, and the number of approved adopters. The cohort represented in the performance dashboard, however, included a number of children with profound disabilities and significant sibling groups who therefore needed specialist placements. This had had the impact on the timeliness of placements which was reflected in the performance data.
- v. The recent Queen's speech had indicated the potential for a regional approach to Adoption. It was thought that this would help Local Authorities to work together to find families that were right for the child. The County Council already worked with all nine East Midlands authorities to ensure that the best placements were found and had also collaborated on an East Midlands wide television advert.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Quarter 4 2014/15 Performance Report be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services extend an invitation to all members of the committee upon request to visit the fostering and adoption team to see the work accomplished by the team, and to ensure members understand the adoption process.

11. Analysis of Key Performance Areas.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services, concerning an analysis of the key performance areas within the department: stability of placements of children in the care of the County Council; the suitability of accommodation for young people leaving the care of the County Council; and performance information about the prevalence of child sexual exploitation. A copy of the report marked "Agenda Item 11" is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. In response to concerns raised about placement stability and suitability, it was noted that this reflected difficulties with correct usage of the Frameworki software. Manual collection of data was considered the most accurate on many occasions. . It was suggested that the Committee should receive a further report about the reliability and accuracy of Framework-I, both in the strategic and operational use of data.
- ii. The analysis of the key performance areas was welcomed by the Committee, however, it was felt that the report did not reflect the complexity of the process for achieving placement stability. To address this, the Director of Children and Family Services was asked to ensure members had an opportunity to scrutinise case studies that showed how the Department responded to Child Protection and Child Sexual Exploitation referrals, and how placement stability was achieved, particularly when a number of different organisations were involved in the case.

Given the difficulties in anonymising data, it was suggested that the case studies were considered by the Child Protection Panel in the first instance.

- iii. With regard to placement commissioning, it was noted that this formed a project within the Transformation Programme. The project was considering the balance between in-house foster carers and independent fostering agencies. The County Council currently commissioned placements on a case by case basis. The intention was to take a more managed approach so that the number and type of placements needed each year was known in advance and commissioned appropriately.
- iv. Concerns were raised over the implications of the commissioning of provision of placements, and how this had the potential to damage the Authority's ability to secure long term placements. The Committee was assured that the Authority had sufficient in house foster care, and that commissioning independent fostering, whilst currently contracted on a case by case basis, was in the planning process and a managed approach would be taken.
- v. Regarding occurrences of statutory rape of minors and prosecutions of offenders, the Director of Children and Family Services undertook to provide a letter for the Chairman to send to the Chief Constable to obtain this information.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the analysis of key performance areas be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services provides a letter for the Chairman to send to the Chief Constable to request information on occurrences of statutory rape of a minor and prosecution of offenders within Leicestershire;
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be asked to provide a report addressing concerns surrounding unreliable data arising from Frameworki and how the reliability of data might be improved;
- (d) That the Director of Children and Family Services be asked to provide case studies to the Child Protection Panel illustrating how the Department responds to Child Protection and Child Sexual Exploitation referrals and how placement stability is achieved.

12. Departmental Inspection Preparation.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services concerning an update on the Department's inspection preparation activity. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 12", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Director of Children and Family Services gave an update on Greengate Children's Home, assuring the committee that the quality and consistency of care was at a better standard than that at the time of the previous inspection, that management and leadership had improved, and that the Department worked to

ensure that the same focus on improvement that was applied at Welland House was applied at Greengate.

- ii. It was noted that Welland House was registered to house four children, and Greengate registered for seven children and young people, two of those being semi-independent flats. Due to the issues that had previously been identified by Ofsted at Greengate, it was not currently filled to capacity.
- iii. Arrangements in children's homes aimed to emulate family life as much as possible, and it was understood that this expectation was being met at Welland House. Due to the physical location of Greengate, however, there was a sense of isolation and difficulties encountered in trying to achieve a sense of family life. The Committee were advised that staff were making additional efforts to remedy this.
- iv. The Committee suggested that a visit to the two children's homes would be helpful for members to see the improvement work that was taking place.
- v. The Committee was pleased to note that the Department worked closely with partners on school improvement, and had an open dialogue with Ofsted, engaging with research and insight for the Department for Education, and acting as the subject for case studies by the Local Government Association. Efforts in this area were part of a collaborative system led approach, and work was taking place to further engage with the regional schools commissioner.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the inspection activity that has occurred within the Children and Family Services department during 2014/15 and the work that has been ongoing as preparation work for forthcoming inspections be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services extend an invitation to members of the Children in Care Panel to visit the two Children's Homes owned by the County Council.

13. First Response Update Following Restructuring.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services concerning an update following the re-structure of the First Response Team. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 12", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee asked for reassurances from the Department that the reduction in the number of single assessments being carried out had not had a detrimental impact on outcomes for children. The Director of Children and Family Services advised that regular quality assurances were conducted by service managers. It was noted that the Department would be undergoing a peer challenge review where external bodies would scrutinise and analyse such issues, and that the report following the peer review would be circulated to members of the committee.
- ii. A concern was expressed that language used in the Target Operating Model was difficult to understand, particularly as partner agencies used a wide variety of

specialist terms that were not used in the same context as those used by the County Council. The Director of Children and Family Services welcomed the feedback and the Department would consider how this could be resolved.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the impact of the recent changes made to the First Response Children's Duty Team and to the Early and Urgent Social Worker Responders Team be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services circulate the report compiled following the peer challenge visit on 4 June 2015.

14. Local Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adult Board Business Plans 2015/16.

The Committee considered a report of the Independent Chair of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board concerning the Board's Business Plan for 2015/2016. A copy of the report marked, "Agenda Item 14", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Improvement priorities for the Board had been identified in the 2013/14 Annual Report and as part of the annual development session, and were built into the Business Plan for 2015/16.
- ii. The Independent Chair met annually with the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children Board was considered by the Commissioner. This allowed the opportunity for collective work on those issues raised.
- iii. It was reported that the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board had no consistent representative from the education sector. Through the education team at Leicestershire County Council, the Board was looking to strengthen links with school representatives including Academies and seeking engagement to ensure that schools were carrying out their legal duties with regard to safeguarding.
- iv. The Committee was advised that whilst commitment and engagement from partner agencies had improved over the past 12 months, the focus of 2015/16 would be to ensure that Board members disseminate messages to the frontline. This would be monitored and achieved through the quality assurance and performance management framework which would provide effective and evidence-based challenge.
- v. The LRSCB has robust e-safety strategies in place though it was acknowledged that further work needed to take place surrounding parent, as well as pupil, awareness. The Independent Chair advised that the first step was to fully understand what work had previously been done to raise awareness, for example that of the safeguarding in education teams, and then existing approaches would be expanded upon where necessary.

- vi. The Committee was reassured of the online availability of materials and resources to advise on e-safety, though it was recognised that there was not universal access to these resources.
- vii. It was suggested that a sensitive approach was needed to raise awareness of Female Genital Mutilation. It was confirmed that engagement with communities would be done through experts and those best placed at communicating with particular community groups. There had been evidence of good work through a project in Bristol, and it was acknowledged that partner agencies needed to be engaged to raise professional awareness of both FGM itself and the risks associated with referrals.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Local Safeguarding Children Board for consideration;
- (b) That the priority and risk areas relating to children identified within the Business Plan for the Local Safeguarding Children Board for 2015/16 be supported.

15. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 September 2015 at 2.00pm.

16. Any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent.

There were no urgent items.

2.00 – 4.00
01 June 2015

CHAIRMAN