

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 7 September 2015.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Spence CC (in the Chair)

Mr. D. C. Bill MBE CC

Mr. S. J. Galton CC

Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC

Mrs. C. Lewis

Mr. A. E. Pearson CC

Mr. J. Perry

Mrs. C. M. Radford CC

Miss. H. Worman CC

17. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2015 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

18. Question Time.

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

19. 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).

20. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration.

21. Declarations of interest

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

Mr. J. Perry declared a personal interest in matters relating to schools, as he had a family member 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 further declarations.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

23. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

24. Quarter 1 Performance Report for 2015/16

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 one of 2015/2016. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that educational results contained within the report did not include those for Key Stage 4 as these needed validating by the Department for Education before analysis.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Concern was expressed over the increase in the number of children with three or more placements during the year, with the measure being below national averages. It was acknowledged that how a placement was defined, and how placements were recorded on Frameworki could affect changes in performance in this area. It was noted that accurate reporting was a recurring issue from Quarter 4, and that staff did not record placement information uniformly across the Department. Further to this, in 44% of cases analysed, the child or young person had experienced a quick move in placement, often moving to another placement after a one or two night stay. A short stay such as this was classed as a placement for the child or young person and this was frequently the case for children where placements had to be made as a matter of urgency. The Committee was advised that there was an increase in kinship placements, with this placement usually being the second for that child or young person. Whilst the authority was required to make attempts to place children with suitable family members where possible, this was not always successful.
- ii. In 20% of cases analysed, the child or young person was moved due to challenging behavioural issues. From January 2015 to the end of Quarter 1, it was noted that the Department had seen a rise in the number of 12-15 year olds in the care of the County Council owing to either extremely challenging behaviour, or due to them having either experienced or being at risk of child sexual abuse.

- iii. The data highlighted that performance with regard to second and subsequent child protection plans had worsened since the last quarter. Consequently, a concern was raised as to the robustness of Child Protection conferences and the indication that some child protection plans were being stepped down too early. It was explained that Child Protection conferences and the outcomes and conclusions of conferences were a product of multi-agency decision making. It was acknowledged that there was further work to be done with all agencies in exploring the length of time it took to affect lasting change in a child's life, and whether this would have an impact on the step down of child protection plans.
- iv. The report described that there was a significant theme concerning children becoming subject of second child protection plans due to repeated occurrences of domestic abuse between adults in the household. The Committee was informed that a combined approach to commissioning and addressing instances of domestic abuse in a child protection context had been established across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.
- v. A concern was expressed over the percentage of five year olds achieving good levels of development. It was questioned whether performance was below national levels due to the fact that some summer-born children were not successful in their applications to defer entry, and that there was a low level of applications generally for deferrals in Leicestershire. The Committee was advised that performance had improved this year, however it was recognised that it was not clear the impact that being a summer-born pupil had on levels of development. The Department for Education were undertaking a piece of work to analyse this issue nationally, and further to this the Director would undertake a piece of work to understand the impact that being a summer-born pupil had on levels of progress within Key Stage 1. It was noted that the County Council had received three applications for deferred entry this year, and that applications went through a rigorous process which took into account the abilities of the child at the time, and considered longer term progression, particularly in relation to transition points.
- vi. The percentage of pupils achieving two levels of progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 in Reading and Maths had fallen, though it was noted that the percentage of schools rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted had risen, and it was acknowledged that levels of progress was one of several measures that Ofsted used to assess school performance. The Committee was advised that the new inspection regime for schools meant that levels of progress would in the future be assessed more consistently with "deeper dives" being conducted into outcomes for individuals to understand the correlation between the two performance measures and how improvement could be made.
- vii. It was queried how data on school performance was collected and analysed, and which schools were required to submit information. It was noted that Key Stage 1 and 2 data was submitted by schools and validated by the local authority before being submitted to the Department for Education. Key Stage 4 data was provided to the local authority by the Department for Education. All schools were required to submit information, and the Committee was assured that any missing data was

identified and schools were contacted to provide the information in order to ensure a full accurate picture of school performance across Leicestershire. The Committee was informed that a report detailing the validated Key Stage 4 data was scheduled to be presented at the following meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Quarter 1 2015/16 Performance Report be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services undertake a piece of work to understand to what extent being a summer-born pupil may affect levels of progress in Key Stage 1, and that once completed, the outcome of the work be circulated to members of the committee for information.

25. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services concerning the Annual Report 2014/2015 of the Independent Reviewing Officers for Looked After Children. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee expressed concern over the issue of caseloads for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), noting that caseloads were above the guidance within the IRO Handbook, and whether the increased caseloads had affected the quality of the service delivered by IROs. The Committee was assured that the issue of caseloads and capacity was being addressed with a recruitment campaign underway within the service. The impact of the high caseloads had meant that whilst IROs were working to statutory requirements, it had been at the minimum acceptable level rather than following the IRO handbook to its fullest.
- ii. The Committee questioned how IROs were able to ensure effective independence and what suggestions the government had offered to enable this. It was argued that establishing an effective escalation process that was fully independent of the local authority would strengthen the independence of the IRO service, and of the challenge role that IROs were able to offer. The Committee was assured that the escalation process in place at the County Council ensured a clear line of sight between the Director and the IRO service and this was felt to be an adequate safeguard to the independence of the service. Birmingham City Council commissioned a fully independent IRO service and other authorities in the UK had aligned the IRO service with that of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) which operated independently of the local authority, however there was at present no intention to roll out these methods.
- iii. It was noted that following an IRO challenge on a particular case, if it was found that there had been a delay in statutory timescales or failure to follow processes, the matter would be escalated appropriately, usually with team managers and

service managers discussing the case with the allocated worker. Should the issue not be resolved at this level, it would be raised at a challenge meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer and the Annual Work Programmes for 2015-16 be noted.

26. Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2014/2015

The Committee considered the Annual Report 2014/2015 of the Independent Chair of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee welcomed the Annual Report and the information contained therein, however a view was expressed that the Safeguarding Board should ensure that alongside measuring compliance, staff fully understood how to implement improvements and affect change. The Independent Chair advised that the new quality assurance and performance management framework went beyond analysing quantitative data and assessed qualitative data as well. Views of frontline practitioners and service users were sought to see if needs were being appropriately responded to and staff views were sought when designing procedures. The Independent Chair explained that the Board consistently sought to test if staff understood procedures, how they were implemented, and if they facilitated best working practices.
- ii. It was acknowledged that in a time of financial constraint, innovative methods of monitoring and implementing change were required. The Signs of Safety model adopted by Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services was considered to be innovative in that it stressed different ways of working to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people. Innovation allowed authorities to maintain stability, particularly within the workforce and it was noted that there was significant commitment to Signs of Safety from staff within the department.
- iii. The Annual Report outlined the membership and attendance of partner organisations across 2014/15. The Committee was advised that there were statutory members of the Board though substitutes were permissible as it was representation from the organisation, not the individual that was sought. Attendance from NHS England had not improved, and it was noted that the Independent Chair was in discussions concerning attendance from statutory members with the East Midlands Chairs' Network, and would report back to the Committee the conclusion of discussions upon completion.
- iv. Following the release of BBC figures showing that more than 5,500 alleged sex crimes in UK schools were reported to the police in the last three years, the Committee stressed the importance of agencies disseminating information to other

agencies appropriately, and the important role the LSCB could play in ensuring this. Though it was believed that this was not an issue in Leicestershire and Rutland, the Independent Chair advised that the LRSCB had a piece of work to undertake to work with all schools to identify those that were not reporting any allegations, and conduct a deep dive to understand if issues were being missed.

- v. It was noted that police attendance at Board meetings was only 50% throughout 2014/15, but attendance in the current year had been 100%. Similarly, attendance from the police at case conferences had improved this year, though the Board continued to challenge in an effort to secure full attendance.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the report and the information provided be noted;
- (b) That comments made be submitted to the Local Safeguarding Children Board for consideration;
- (c) That the Independent Chair report back to the Committee the outcome of discussions with the East Midlands Chairs' Network concerning attendance of statutory partners of Local Safeguarding Children Boards.

27. Dates of future meetings

RESOLVED:

It was noted that future meetings of the Committee were scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on the following dates:

2 November 2015
 18 January 2016
 4 April 2016
 13 June 2016
 5 September 2016
 7 November 2016

2.00pm – 3.15pm
 07 September 2015

CHAIRMAN