

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 2 November 2015.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Spence CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC
Mr. L. J. P. O'Shea CC

Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC
Miss. H. Worman CC

28. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held 7 September 2015 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

29. Question Time.

The following questions were put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Question by Ms. Sue Whiting, resident:

“Could the chair please tell me how many EHCP assessments have been requested for young offenders since 1st September 2015 when the children and families act became law?”

Reply by the Chairman:

“The number of EHC plans requested for young offenders since 1st September 2015 is 3.”

Ms Whiting asked the following supplementary question:

“How many EHC plans were requested in the year 1st September 2014 to 31st August 2015 and how is this being monitored against the number of young offenders being sent to young offender centres?”

The Director of Children and Family Services, on behalf of the Chairman, undertook to respond to this question in writing.

30. 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).

31. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

32. 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 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.

No further declarations were made.

33. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

34. Presentation of Petitions.

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

35. Education of Children in Care.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services concerning the role of and work undertaken by the Leicestershire Virtual School in supporting the education of Leicestershire's Children in Care. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- i. A concern was expressed that the report did not include information on how Leicestershire's Children in Care were performing against those of statistical neighbours and nationally. It was felt that this information would better enable the Committee to understand if issues were regional, national, or local and what could be done to improve educational outcomes in light of this. The Committee was informed that Children in Care's educational results at Key Stage 4 nationally were poor, and below that in Leicestershire. It was acknowledged that Leicestershire's performance in this regard required improvement;
- ii. It was reported that results in Key Stage 2 for Children in Care were good but were however falling behind at Key Stage 4. The Committee was advised that the cohort reported on had high levels of children with special educational needs and disabilities which had impacted the results;
- iii. The Committee enquired as to whether there was a correlation between KS4 results and those children taken into care at an older age. The Committee was informed that results for children taken into care during KS4 showed that there

was less opportunity for sustained progress and therefore results often suffered. However, these young people often had better chances later in life at post 16, and the Virtual School reported that it worked with post 16 cohorts to ensure sustained development;

- iv. The Committee queried what the Virtual School was doing to improve the educational outcomes of Leicestershire's children in care. School staff and partners used focussed personal education plans, targeted the use of pupil premium, and took multi-agency approaches to try and meet the needs of the children in care. The meetings at which the focussed personal education plans were discussed involved children's carers, social workers, and young people were also encouraged to have an input into their plans. The Virtual School worked with designated teachers also to understand the needs of the children in care so that the personal educational plans could be planned to meet these specific needs;
- v. The Virtual School worked to raise the aspirations of Leicestershire's Children in Care, and one method used was to offer University taster days to children as young as 10 and 11 in primary years 5 and 6;
- vi. Good working relationships were maintained with other Virtual Schools as part of Leicestershire's cohort was placed outside of County, and swift access to school places was needed;
- vii. Pupil premium was utilised in schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged children. It was reported that Schools were best placed to understand how the additional funding should be applied so as to meet the needs of the Children in Care. The Virtual School effectively monitored the use of pupil premium and requested breakdowns of how the funding would be used against the personal education plans of individual children to ensure that it was being utilised effectively. Funds were released to schools on a termly basis to allow regular monitoring. Central funding was also available for use for children that needed additional support such as one to one tuition;
- viii. To ensure that Children in Care were being supported during the Summer holidays, the Virtual School worked with Foster Carers and those agencies involved in the focussed personal education planning meetings to make sure that funding was used effectively to support the children throughout the entire year and that support was also received outside of the School during the holiday periods;
- ix. The Committee queried whether the Virtual School stretched those Children in Care who were achieving or had over-achieved. It was reported that the Virtual School supported all Children in Care to achieve at all levels and that there had been some individual successes whereby two young people had achieved places at their first choice University;
- x. Schools employed designated teachers who were responsible for the educational achievement of children in care in their school. To ensure that the staff employed held the requisite skills, the Virtual School worked with schools and Governors to assist in identifying appropriate staff. Ongoing training was provided to designated teachers and the Virtual School was undertaking a new piece of work with college staff also. It was noted that in Primary schools, the designated teacher was often the Head teacher, in secondary schools it was usually a senior member of staff

with up to date training, skills and appropriate understanding of children in care's needs;

- xi. A concern was expressed around how levels of attendance and motivation could affect the learning of young people, and the Committee questioned how the Virtual School worked with schools to secure high attendance and encourage motivation in their children in care. Whilst the Virtual School did not directly work with young people, it acted as part of a partnership that was alerted to issues around non-attendance and was able to contribute to the partnership by monitoring and discussing any concerns. With regard to motivation and self-esteem, the Department more generally offered a number of opportunities for children in care to increase their confidence and self-esteem both in and out of school through Football Clubs, the Beacon Choir, and the Tall Ships project run by the Virtual School. It was suggested that the Children's Social Care Panel explore the education of children in care and the support provided by the Virtual School, particularly in those instances where educational attendance was known to be below average.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Education of Children in Care report be noted;
- b) That the Children's Social Care Panel be asked to explore the education of Children in Care and the support provided by the Virtual School, particularly in those instances where educational attendance is known to be below average.

36. School Performance in Key Stage Tests and Examinations.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services on school performance and overview of outcomes in key stage tests and examinations. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee was advised that data on Key Stage 4 results within the report had yet to be validated. It was agreed that following validation, the results would be circulated to the Committee for information.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee welcomed the report noting that improvements had been made across a number of areas partly as result of work undertaken by the Leicestershire Education Excellent Partnership (LEEP);
- ii. The Committee queried whether an analysis of the results of those schools that had undergone an age range change had been produced and whether age range changes had impacted on educational outcomes. It was reported that five schools which had undergone age range changes had seen results below the Leicestershire average of 48.1% of English and Maths A*-C GCSE achievement. However, it was felt that it would be more beneficial to analyse the results of schools with a longer history of age range changes to understand the impact that age range changes have had on educational outcomes;

- iii. A concern was expressed over the level of achievement in Studio Schools. The Committee was assured that the Department would be challenging the results of studio schools to ascertain why they were below standard;
- iv. The County Council had a limited role and no powers of intervention concerning the results of Academies, however, through LEEP it was noted that they were able to challenge and have conversations to understand broader issues that may be affecting the educational outcomes of children across the County and work collaboratively to make improvements. It was felt that whilst there were strong working relationships and support networks between academies and local authority maintained schools, if an academy was failing the only option was for the Director of Children and Family Services to write to the School Commissioner. It was noted that inductions had been re-introduced for new school heads to give them a better understanding of the educational system in Leicestershire.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the School Performance in Key Stage Tests and Examinations report be noted;
- b) That following validation, Key Stage 4 data be made available to Committee members for information.

37. Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2014/15.

The Committee considered the joint Annual report of the Director of Children and Family Services and the Director of Corporate Resources on Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments 2014/15. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee welcomed the report and felt that there was a significant amount of member learning that could be undertaken alongside the report. It was suggested that the Children's Social Care Panel be asked to examine a selection of cases to better understand the nature of complaints, the complaints procedure, and any opportunities for remedial action.

It was acknowledged that at a time of financial constraint with many services being cut, complaints may rise. Some complaints pertained to delays in services being provided and it was felt that whilst this may be avoidable in some cases, it was often due to a lack of communication with service users that complaints were made. It was felt that in this regard the Authority could improve in managing the expectations of service users, and keeping them well informed of time scales.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2014/15 be noted;
- (b) That the Children's Social Care Panel be asked to examine a selection of cases to better understand the nature of complaints, the process undertaken and any opportunities for remedial action.

38. Leicestershire's Response to Child Sexual Exploitation.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services on Leicestershire County Council's response to Child Sexual Exploitation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee was informed that a partnership bid aimed at funding a range of initiatives intended to build capacity and capability in preventing, identifying and tackling CSE over the next two financial years had been endorsed by the Strategic Partnership Board.

Specialist care placements for those children who had experienced or were at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation were commissioned from high cost external specialist residential providers in order to deliver the desired outcomes. The Committee was advised that the Department was forecast to overspend on total placement costs across Social Care by approximately £6m this year. Some placements for victims or those at risk of CSE often needed to be out of County to disrupt connections and relationships with perpetrators. In the previous financial year, CSE placements alone had cost £1.4m and this was expected to rise going into the next financial year.

With regard to the bid to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, members were advised that it would fund additional posts such as a specialist parenting post, and a forensic psychologist, and was aimed at accelerating the pace of improvement with regards to tackling CSE. It was agreed that the bid details be circulated to members of the Committee for information.

It was suggested that a further report be presented to the Committee in six months outlining the progress and impact of improvement work.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report and Leicestershire's response to tackling Child Sexual Exploitation be noted;
- (b) That the details of the application for funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner be made available to Committee members for information;
- (c) That a further report be presented to the Committee in six months outlining the impact of the ongoing work aimed at tackling Child Sexual Exploitation.

39. School Transport and School Food.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services on the activities of the school transport service and the school food services. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

A concern was expressed around the cost of transport for parents with children attending different schools when places at their local schools were not available. It was suggested that the Environment and Transport Committee be advised of these concerns and be asked to look at the matter with particular reference to any planned changes to the Leicestershire school transport policy to provide transport for distances over 2 miles for eligible primary pupils up to the age of 11.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report on School Transport and School Food be noted;
- (b) That the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee be :
 - i. Advised of concerns surrounding the cost of transport for those parents with children attending different schools when places at their local school were not available;
 - ii. To provide assurances that there are no planned changes to the Leicestershire' school transport policy to provide transport for distances over 2 miles for eligible primary pupils up to the age of 11.

40. 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:

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

2.00
02 November 2015

CHAIRMAN