

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 5 September 2016.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Spence CC (in the Chair)

Mr. G. Hirst
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Ms. K. J. Knaggs CC
Mr. A. E. Pearson CC

Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC

15. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2016 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Question Time.

The following question was put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Question by Ms Sue Whiting, resident:

As Dyslexia Awareness Week is 3rd -9th October 2016, could the Chair please advise what events are being planned for the week this year following on from the increasingly successful events held in previous years for families with identified dyslexic children?

Reply by the Chairman:

This year during Dyslexia Awareness Week, the Learning Support Service is planning to contribute to 2 events for school governors, in order to promote awareness of dyslexia and to demonstrate and showcase information, approaches and resources which can be used in schools at Quality First Teaching (classroom) level and at a targeted level for pupils who require extra support. The two events fall on the Monday (3rd October) of the week.

17. 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).

18. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

19. 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 D Snartt CC declared a personal interest in all items on the agenda as two members of his family were teachers.

Ms K Knaggs declared a personal interest in all items on the agenda as she worked as a teacher at a school within her division.

Mr A E Pearson CC declared a personal interest in all items on the agenda as he managed a company which provided physical activity services to schools in Leicestershire. He was also a Governor of Leicester College.

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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

21. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

22. Leicestershire's Response to Child Sexual Exploitation.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which outlined the progress of the County Council's Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) team, the deployment of resources and the progress of related multi-agency developments. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

The Director highlighted the increase in referrals in relation to children at risk of CSE during 2015-16 but noted that this mirrored the national trend.

The Committee was advised that a number of additional specialists, including nurses and a forensic psychologist, had been recruited to the team and that following a growth bid it was hoped that the team would be moving to a bigger base in October.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Performance information had highlighted that whilst there had been an overall increase in referrals during 2015-16, there had been a fall in the number received in the previous quarter. It was noted that the team continued to operate under the CEASE banner with the Police and other partners and it was thought that this work had resulted in an improved quality of referrals being received by the team which may have contributed to the decreasing number of referrals in the last quarter;
- ii. The report outlined possible risks in association with the development of an integrated sub-regional arrangement involving Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland local authority staff and partners working within the multi-agency CSE

team. One such risk that concerned the Committee was that County Council resources would be diverted away from Leicestershire residents. It was reported that the County Council's priority in terms of case allocation was and would always be children within Leicestershire and that at the time Leicestershire staff did not respond to City cases and were not in a position to do so;

- iii. A query was raised in relation to how the team remained sighted of potential issues in relation to referrals which at the time had not required any action. It was explained that development of a new information sharing tool which had been tested by the police would assist in the sharing and logging of soft intelligence. Further to this weekly meetings were held with the Police to share new intelligence and to consider any developments in open cases. A new system whereby a flag could be raised on a child or young person's NHS record to signify that they had received a service in relation to CSE or were at risk of CSE was being developed. Working physically alongside colleagues from health and the police at the hub ensured that partners were able to share information quickly;
- iv. A further appointment of a community faith lead to the CSE Multi-Agency team to target harder to reach and underrepresented communities such as those from a BME background was being considered;
- v. The Committee queried how effective programmes such as Chelsea's Choice and Kayleigh's Love Story have been in terms of referrals received and disclosures. Whilst feedback from education colleagues about the videos had been positive and some referrals and queries had been received, it was crucial to ensure that these were used alongside other learning materials about CSE and that the videos would not prove successful in isolation;
- vi. A question was raised about whether there had been any learning from Rotherham and it was reported that the team regularly researched around best practice nationally, and that the CSE hub itself was considered good practice;

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on Leicestershire's response to Child Sexual Exploitation be noted;
- b) That the Committee welcomed the recruitment of further specialists to the Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation Hub.

23. Quarter 1 2016/17 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update of the Children and Families performance at the end of quarter one of 2016/17. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Director advised that the report contained a number of differences from previous reports in that there were new performance indicators that were aligned with the Council's Corporate Strategy 2017/18 and associated performance management data set. Where blanks were evident in the performance dashboard, this was due to the fact that data had not been available, and that in the next quarter the indicators would be updated following analysis of data. In relation to school results, it had not been possible

to provide a comparison from the previous year as examination systems had changed and a comparison would not provide a comprehensive assessment of progress.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee sought further clarification around the Channel programme and the referral process. Channel was linked to the National Prevent agenda, and was aimed at providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable and at risk of being drawn into terrorism. It was noted that schools were the highest referring sector, and that these referrals were received by the Police. If any safeguarding concern was identified then the referral would also be considered by social care. All key partners were trained in relation to both Channel and Prevent and all partners were capable of making a referral and responsible for informing the relevant agency of any concerns;
- ii. There had been a significant improvement in relation to the number of looked after children subject to three or more placements, which the Committee was pleased to note;
- iii. Over the past three quarters there had been concerns over the number of children and young people subject to second and subsequent child protection plans. In this quarter however there had been an improvement in performance and whilst it was recognised that there would be further work necessary to sustain the performance, it was promising that measures put in place had secured some improvement. Measures had included strengthening the robustness around children in need planning, and the production of practice guidance around children in need planning which had been shared on a multi-agency basis. It was felt that improvements would need to be seen over a 12 month period to be confident that the work that had taken place had embedded lasting change in practice;
- iv. It was noted that Government were due to publicise reports around the measurements of success of the Troubled Families Programme. It was questioned whether the County Council had experienced any financial benefits as a result of the Supporting Leicestershire Families programme. The Director advised that it was difficult to identify cause and effect, and though it was thought that early intervention was a factor in the prevention of families being in receipt of social care services in future, caution should be taken in making such assumptions. The Committee requested that following publication, a report analysing the effectiveness of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme be presented.
- v. The Committee asked that information around Ofsted outcomes and categorisation, and the breakdown of these between academies and maintained schools be circulated for information;
- vi. The gap between the pupils eligible for Free School Meals achieving expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics, and achievement of those 'not eligible' had increased, and the Committee queried what work was underway to address this. The Director reported that work was underway with teaching schools around developing plans to mitigate the impact of changes to the national system of entitlement. Further to this a pupil premium project funded by the Leicestershire Education Excellent Partnership was looking at best practice nationally and it was hoped that it would contain some insight into how to address the issue;

- vii. A concern was raised over the significant different in attainment in relation to writing and reading at key stage two (KS2). Discrepancies had been identified in school results this year and it was thought that further testing was required to ensure that KS2 data itself was robust and in the first instance, and the concern raised would be a key line of enquiry as part of this investigation;

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Quarter 1 2016/17 Performance Report be noted;
- b) That following publication of reports by Government around the measurements of success of the Troubled Families Programme, a report around the successes and effectiveness of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme be presented to a future meeting of the Committee;
- c) That information around Ofsted outcomes and categorisation and the breakdown of these between academies and maintained schools within Leicestershire be circulated to the Committee for information.

24. Transferring in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children.

The Committee considered a report around activity in relation to the new duty concerning Transferring in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) following the recent introduction of the Interim National Transfer Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children 2016/17. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Whilst the Committee emphasised its belief that everything possible should be done to care for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children, it remained wary of the financial impact of such an arrangement, particularly given that the estimated costs were not felt to be reliable. It was felt that the Government had not given due consideration to the consequences for authorities in relation to the types and level of services that some children may require following transfer, which in cases where complex levels of support or specialist accommodation were required would significantly increase the cost of each placement. Further to this the Government costing model appeared to have been based on solely the cost of in house placements such as foster care, and had not taken into account resource costings such as social workers and support staff. Until the needs of each child was known to the authority, it remained difficult to estimate the cost of such a placement. It was expected that the impact of this would put significant strain on the Council's ability to fulfil its statutory obligations with regard to finding and funding appropriate placements for children in and out of Leicestershire.

It was highlighted that the arrangement was a voluntary one, and that only two regions within the UK had signed up to the scheme. All UASCs transferred to the County Council to date had had to be placed out of the County area, though the age assessments and looked after children duties remained the responsibility of the Council.

The Committee agreed that a letter should be written from the Chair and Spokes, and signed by the three Party Political leads, to the Minister for Immigration outlining that whilst the County Council was committed to ensuring that it accommodated a reasonable number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children that required transfer, that all associated costs be fully met by the Government.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on Transferring in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) be noted;
- b) That the Chair and Spokes write to the Minister for Immigration outlining that whilst the County Council is committed to ensuring that it accommodates a reasonable number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children that require transfer that associated costs should be met fully by the Government;
- c) That a further update on Transferring in UASCs be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

25. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2015-16.

The Committee considered the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with regard to children in care which outlined the extent to which Leicestershire County Council had fulfilled its responsibilities to the children in its care for the period April 2015 – March 2016. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

It was reported that the service had experience some challenges with regard to recruitment over the period covered by the report. Consequently, staff were experiencing high caseloads and some development work had had to carry over to this financial year. However, a number of developments had been progressed and it was reported that team managers had been provided with a greater level of detail on team performance so that any discrepancies could be identified and addressed promptly.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee was concerned that a number of challenges and areas for improvement from the 2014/15 annual report were also featured in the annual report for 2015/16, and whether there had been a significant impact on the service provided to children and young people as a result of improvements not being progressed. It was reported that the work on the ground had continued to be robust and that the service has met all of its statutory obligations, and that the impact had largely been that added value had not been met. For instance, the service had not been able to develop improved information systems. The Committee sought assurances that the service would be able to progress improvement works within this year. It was noted that recent appointments to the team had been made which had alleviated some resource concerns, however there was the intention to draw concerns to the attention of the Departmental Management Team and seek assistance in securing additional resources. Progress had also been made in relation to improving data collection around capturing contacts and visits made by IROs;
- ii. It was requested that in future reports of the IRO, that associated RAG reports and action plans contain a greater level of narrative that would help inform readers of the direction of travel and progress being made;
- iii. The Scrutiny Committee received the IRO Annual Report in relation the Children in Care automatically as it was a statutory requirement, however it was felt that it

would be helpful in future to present this alongside the IRO Annual Report in relation to Child Protection to analyse any common themes between the two.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2015-16 be noted;
- b) That Annual Reports of the Independent Reviewing Officers in association with Children in Care also be considered by the Committee in future.

26. Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board 2015/16.

The Committee considered the Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board for 2015/16. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

The Independent Chair outlined the main areas of success of the Board over 2015/16, and those areas where further work was required as detailed within the report. It was noted that the Board was fully compliant with Working Together and had been successful in the past year in addressing attendance concerns over key partners. There did however remain a concern over attendance by the probation service and it was now known that their financial contribution was to be lessened in the New Year.

The Board had strong relationships with both Leicestershire County Council and Rutland County Council internal bodies and committees, and there was a good culture of challenge from their respective Health and Wellbeing Boards, Scrutiny bodies, and Cabinets.

A key focus for the Board in the New Year was ensuring that improvements be made around the number of repeat and subsequent child protection plans that children in Leicestershire were subject to. The County Council had a number of actions being progressed to secure improvements and the Board was confident that the issues were being addressed appropriately. A further area that the Board would need to give greater consideration to in this financial year was around safeguarding children with disabilities which had not featured within previous Business Plans.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- i. The Committee was pleased to note the work completed around e-safety and in particular the Board's response to the prevalence of online Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). It was reported that building resilience in individuals remained a key focus for the Board contained within the business plan and strategy document as part of a proportionate approach to managing the risk of CSE. It was also emphasised as part of training with education staff. It was felt that this was not properly articulated within the annual report and it was suggested that the Chair endeavour to include information around the work of the Board and its impact in building resilience in individuals;

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board 2015/16 be noted;

- b) That the comments made be submitted to the Safeguarding Children Board for consideration.

27. Dates of Future Meetings.

It was noted that future meetings of the Committee were scheduled to take place at 1.30pm on the following dates:

7 November 2016
16 January 2017
6 March 2017
5 June 2017
11 September 2017
13 November 2017.

1.30pm – 3.55pm
05 September 2016

CHAIRMAN