

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 16 January 2017.

PRESENT

Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC (in the Chair)

Mr. G. Hirst  
Mr. D. Jennings CC  
Mr. J. Kaufman CC  
Ms. K. J. Knaggs CC  
Mrs. C. Lewis

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

In Attendance.

Mr G A Hart CC, Cabinet Support Member  
Pat Fraser, Healthwatch Representative

41. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2016 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

42. Question Time.

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

43. 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).

44. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

45. 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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

47. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

48. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 - 2020/21.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Children and Family Services and the Director of Corporate Resources on the proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2017/18 – 2020/21 as it related to Children and Family Services. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Support Member, Mr. G. A. Hart CC who was attending for this item.

In his introduction to the report, the Director of Children and Family Services explained that the majority of savings proposed in the MTFS had been identified in previous years, although some adjustments had been made as a result of further work to develop the proposals. The MTFS proposals also reflected the need for growth in two areas. These were: the social care placements budget, where the number of looked after children had increased and was expected to continue to do so, putting significant pressure on the budget; and social care. There were three elements to the social care growth: the need to reduce caseloads to a reasonable level; improvements to the systems and processes for quality assurance; and the capacity of the Children's Rights Service.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

**Service Transformation**

- (i) The transformation programme for the department would need to respond to expected legislative changes. These changes included the Children and Social Work Bill, a White Paper which would clarify the role of local authorities in education and the proposals for fairer funding for schools which were currently the subject of consultation. It was agreed that a report outlining the proposals set out in the Children and Social Work Bill would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

**Growth**

- (ii) Concern was expressed that, despite the growth included in the social care placements budget (G1), there was also a savings requirements from the same budget (CF2) which was larger than the growth being made available. The Committee was advised that children's social care had received an investment of approximately £8 million the previous year. The growth proposed in the MTFS would enable the department to meet the increased level of demand, however, it was expected that more cost effective placements would be identified in order to achieve the savings target. Work was already underway to reduce the number of residential placements and increase the number of looked after children placed with

in-house foster carers. Placements in family settings resulted in better outcomes as well as being more cost effective.

- (iii) The Department's strategy to increase the number of in-house foster carers was acknowledged to be challenging, especially as the foster care market had not been fully tested before so its capacity was not known. The need to place unaccompanied asylum seeking children could also present a challenge. There would need to be careful management of the strategy with regular targets set to ensure it was delivering as expected. The largest level of savings would be achieved through a reduction in the number of residential placements, although some savings would be realised through a reduction in the use of independent foster carers. Work was already underway to recruit more in-house foster carers.

### **Savings**

- (iv) With regard to the review of the Children's Centre Programme (CF4), it was confirmed that the review undertaken in 2016 had encompassed the whole range of services provided by Children's Centres and had considered them all on the same basis regardless of which organisation owned them. Work was currently being undertaken with partners to consider how the savings requirement would be met, including exploring options for how Children's Centres could be used differently. It was suggested that the views of service users and volunteers should also be sought. It was confirmed that the proposal would be subject to a business case which would be submitted to both the Cabinet and this Committee for consideration.
- (v) The importance of preventative work to reduce the demands on Children and Family Services was acknowledged. The cross cutting Early Help and Prevention Review would focus on areas where efficiencies could be achieved by joining up services and by departments working together. It was led by the Director of Public Health, with the Assistant Director for Early Help and Education as the lead officer for Children and Family Services. The Early Help Strategy was also being refreshed to ensure that it was aligned to social care priorities and that service provision was targeted in the areas where it would have the biggest impact.
- (vi) It was considered that the Department did not deliver a universal early help service; County Council staff targeted their support to vulnerable parents and families. The Children's Centre provision included some universal services such as stay and play groups but they were run by volunteers. Part of the review of the Children's Centre Programme would focus on enhancing the role of the voluntary sector and parents in the provision of universal services. Members of the Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring that the use of volunteers was sustainable and cautioned against their over use.
- (vii) With regard to the proposal to introduce a charge for academy conversion (CF9), it was clarified that the Diocese could also hold assets for voluntary controlled schools and that the employer in the case of voluntary aided schools was the school governors. Further details relating to why church school conversions were considered to be more complex and costly than community schools would be provided following the meeting. It was noted that the charges proposed by the County Council were reasonable but that other areas did not charge different rates depending on the type of school being converted.

*[Subsequent to the meeting, it was confirmed that there was an error in the report. Fees were proposed to be £3,500 for Voluntary Aided Schools and £5,000 for Community Schools. The total proposed saving of £70,000 remained unchanged.]*

- (viii) It was confirmed that the County Council did not currently have a policy that required schools to become academies, except in cases of poor performance. The White Paper on Education was expected to clarify the Government's position with regard to academies.

### **Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools Budget**

- (ix) It was confirmed that there was currently flexibility to move funding between the Schools Block and the High Needs Block for 2017/18. However, the future of the High Needs Block was currently subject to national consultation. If it was not possible to move funding between the blocks in the future then the County Council would have to reduce expenditure in these areas.

### **Savings under Development**

- (x) It was proposed that a new service model for disabled children's respite care could be developed. This area had the potential to make savings through reducing the reliance on residential settings for short breaks and increasing the range of provision, for example through foster carers or a buddying scheme. Good practice from other authorities would be considered in developing the proposal and it was confirmed that any proposal would be developed jointly with the NHS. It was likely that, if the proposal was taken further, it could take a few years before it was ready to be implemented.

### **Other Funding Sources**

- (xi) It was considered that the funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government for the Troubled Families Programme was estimated as part of the funding came from a payment by results scheme. The £0.9 million did not include funding from partner contributions.
- (xii) The estimated £0.35 million for supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children related to funding that would be received from the Home Office. The full cost for this area of work was much greater.

### **Capital Programme**

- (xiii) The capital funding for structural changes to the pattern of education relating to 10+ education would make places available in primary schools to facilitate phased change including building extra accommodation. The first two years of the capital programme were fairly certain as government grants had been confirmed and the estimates of Section 106 contributions from developers were robust. For the second two years of the capital programme there was less clarity; it was difficult to predict the level of Section 106 contributions that would be available.
  - (a) That the report and information now provided be noted;
  - (b) That the comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration at its meeting on 25 January 2017;

(c) That reports be submitted to future meetings of the Committee on the following matters:-

- The implications of Children and Social Work Bill for the County Council;
- The Council's strategy for fostering;
- The review of the Children's Centre Programme.

(d) That further details relating to why church school conversions were considered to be more complex and costly than community schools be provided to the Committee.

#### 49. Quarter 2 2016/17 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Families Services which provided an update of the Children and Families Service performance at the end of quarter 2 of 2016/17. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) Members welcomed the sustained improvement in performance for the number of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time.
- (ii) With regard to the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation, it was noted that the County Council was responsible for care leavers until the age of 25, although they were not obliged to keep in contact with the Council. Accommodation that was considered to be unsuitable included bed and breakfast accommodation, custody, prison and mental health in-patient wards. The Committee was assured that officers regularly reviewed all care leavers, including those who were not in contact, and supported them as much as possible to help them make good life choices. Work was also being undertaken to improve data quality in this area.
- (iii) The figure for care leavers in education, employment or training was not directly comparable with the general figure of young people not in education, employment or training as the age range for each indicator was different. However, some concern was expressed that the care leaver figure was low. The Department had a strategy to address this which would be looked at in more detail by the Children in Care Panel and reported back to this Committee.
- (iv) It was confirmed that supporting families back into work was still a priority for the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme. Areas of focus included improving the access that families had to employment advisors.
- (v) With regard to the percentage of reception pupils with free school meal status achieving a 'good' level of development, it was noted that the Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership (LEEP) had a significant focus on vulnerable learners. The school readiness and early years strategy was also being refreshed jointly with partners including children's centres with a view to improving performance in this area.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Children and Families Service performance at the end of quarter 2 of 2016/17 be noted;
- (b) That a report on accommodation for care leavers and the numbers in education, employment and training be submitted to the Children in Care Panel and to a future meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

50. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 6 March 2017 at 1.30pm.

1.30 - 3.25 pm  
16 January 2017

CHAIRMAN