

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 6 March 2017.

PRESENT

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

Mr. G. Hirst
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Mr. L. J. P. O'Shea 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

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Lewis and Mr Perry.

In Attendance

Mr. I. D. Ould CC – Cabinet Lead Member.

51. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2017.

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2017 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

52. Question Time.

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

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

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

54. 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.

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

Mr O'Shea declared a personal interest in all items on the agenda as his daughter worked in a school nursery.

Dr Eynon declared an interest in Item 9 as a salaried GP and a volunteer at Ashmount School.

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

There were no declarations of the party whips.

57. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

58. Ofsted Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families concerning the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of children social care services in Leicestershire and an Action Plan prepared to address the recommendation contained with the Ofsted report. A copy of the report, marked Agenda Item 8, is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions and comments made by members of the Committee, the Director and Cabinet Lead Member advised as follows:-

- i) The most recent self-assessment undertaken had concluded that the outcome of the inspection was likely to find that the Authority would be rated as requiring improvement but noting that there were areas of good practice. The Ofsted findings therefore reflected the most recent self-assessment and the Council should therefore accept the findings and seek to address the recommendations contained in the report;
- ii) Based on the self-assessment and in advance of the Ofsted inspection the Department had begun to address some of the issues now identified in the Ofsted report with an investment of £0.5million for making improvements. As a result the Action Plan contained references of work having commenced in January. The Ofsted inspection team were made aware of these proposals and whilst generally supportive advised that they were unable to factor these into their consideration as it was too early to assess their impact;
- iii) The Action Plan would be revised in the light of further work being undertaken and having regard to the impact of the work already underway. As such, and given the need to engage with partners, it was not possible to provide a definitive statement of the resource requirements at this stage. In this regard the Committee were reminded that many of the proposed actions did not have a resource requirement but were about embedding good management and social work practices within teams;
- iv) There was no clear view as to a appropriate social work case load as it varied with the complexity of the case and experience of the staff dealing with the case.

However, having recognised that case-loads were on the high side part of the £0.5 million investment was used to engage temporary social work staff. The aim of the department was to have permanent staff in post wherever possible but given the increasingly competitive market for social work staff it needed to engaged interim staff;

- v) With regard to the criticisms made about support to newly qualified social work staff this had been accepted. The Department was now working with the Learning and Development service to address this and involved providing support and mentoring from senior practitioners.
- vi) The concerns regarding First Response related primarily to the timeliness of response and not so much the quality of the response. The Action Plan had prioritised this area with a view to seeking early improvements in response times;
- vii) The Action Plan would be submitted to Ofsted as required. Under the current arrangements there would not be a direct follow up on the Action Plan. There was need to have in place robust systems to ensure implementation of actions but also to provide evidence as to whether such actions were having the desired impact. In addition the Department would look to other means of assessing its performance including a Peer Review process;
- viii) The difficulties identified in the Ofsted report regard therapeutic services such as CAMHS were recognised. The most recent Care Quality Commission report into therapeutic services provided by the Leicestershire Partnership Trust also raised similar concerns. In this regard members were advised that a summit was to be held in mid-March involving the key stakeholders to find a way forward. The Director indicated that he would be pressing for a review of the CAHMS contract and for the development of a new pathway for services which included some early interventions which would in turn reduce the need for more intensive services. The development of the new Children's Plan and the establishment of a new Children's Partnership Group as part of the Health and Wellbeing Board would provide a dedicated forum for championing children health services;
- ix) The concerns raised regarding housing support for young people aged 16-17 was acknowledged and the Director would seek to bring forward actions aimed at speeding up support for these young people.

RESOLVED:-

That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee notes the recommendations set out in the report and:-

- a) accepts the findings of the Ofsted inspection report;
- b) welcomes and supports the Action Plan prepared in response;
- c) would wish to work with the Department and Lead Member to develop a new performance management and monitoring framework so that the proposed actions are implemented and monitored to ensure that they are delivering the required improvements in services to children and young people;

- d) has requested the Director of Children and Families Service to report to the next meeting with an update on the action plan and proposals new performance and monitoring referred to in (c) above.

59. Local Safeguarding Children Board Business Plans 2017/18.

The Committee considered a report of the Independent Chairman of the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Board which set out the business plan priorities for the coming year, 2017/18. A copy of the report, marked Agenda Item 8, is filed with these minutes.

The Independent Chairman, Mr Paul Burnett, outlined the priorities going forward and advised the Committee that these priorities paid due regard to the findings of the Ofsted inspection report. He drew particular attention to his concerns regarding services for promoting the emotional health and wellbeing of young people and supported the views expressed in the earlier discussion on the Ofsted report about seeking improvements in the CAHMS service and developing an early intervention offer.

In response to a comment regarding improving support for young care leavers who were homeless or at risk of being homeless, Mr Burnett indicated that he would take the concerns now expressed to the Safeguarding Board Executive for consideration.

RESOLVED:-

That subject to the comments now made the priorities of the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Board in relation to children safeguarding be supported.

60. Fostering and Adoption - Details on Adoption Placement Breakdown, Pressures in the LAC System and the Future Strategy for Fostering.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families concerning an update on adoption placement breakdowns, the pressures in the Looked after Children Service and the future strategy for fostering. A copy of the report, marked Agenda Item 10, is filed with these minutes.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:-

Adoption

- a) The Service had recently begun a recruitment exercise given the increase in the number of children seeking adoption;
- b) Whilst the Service was required to provide support to adoptive parents for a period of three years where necessary such support was available beyond the three years;

Looked After Children

- c) The increase in the numbers of looked after children were increasing pressures but the Service had responded to the challenges this posed. The Ofsted inspection findings were that the placements for children looked after were good ;
- d) Care leavers were supported and monitored and further information would be provided in the next update to members;

Fostering

- e) The increase in the number of looked after children and the impending retirement of some 60 foster carers meant that the Service was now looking to recruit approximately 200 new foster carers over the next four years. A marketing campaign had been agreed to raise awareness and there were targeted recruitment campaigns being undertaken. The level of interest had been high and in the current year 26 applicants had been approved by the Panel against a target of 31;
- f) Foster care was seen as a more appropriate form of care as opposed to institutional care and provided greater scope for finding good placements for children;
- g) Recently there had been an increase in larger sibling groups coming into care and this had placed pressures on finding appropriate placements;
- h) The costs of in-house foster care significantly lower than the private fostering sector. On average there would be a saving of £15,000 per annum on an ordinary placement rising to £150,000 where more complex one-to one care was provided. The marketing and recruitment campaign which was costing approximately £50,000per annum should be seen in this context;
- i) The Foster care strategy would also look at the payments made to in-house foster carers to ensure that such payments were in line with the rates paid by other agencies. In this regard it was pointed out that whilst payment rates were important of greater importance was the support and engagement of the service with foster carers;
- j) There was a higher than expected number of safeguarding concerns raised this year. This was being looked into and the checks made before approval of a foster carer were being strengthened;
- k) There had been an increase in the number of ‘connected carers’. These were carers who had some connection with the child (relatives or friends) and who had agreed to foster the child. Such carers were registered as foster carers and supported in the same way. Given that such carers would also know the child and their background it was sometimes necessary to provide additional support to deal with wider issues.

Members welcomed the update provided, expressed their support for the strategy to recruit additional foster carers and requested an update on the recruitment campaign.

RESOLVED:-

That the report and update now provided be noted.

61. 2018/19 School and High Needs Funding Proposals.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families concerning a proposed response to the consultation paper issued by the Government on the National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools and the formulaic basis for the distribution of the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2018/19. A copy of the report, marked Agenda Item 8, is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member advised the Committee that the F40 Group were not in favour of the proposals outlined in the consultation document even though a number of them would benefit. Leicestershire would see no overall benefit and most schools would be adversely affected. He advised that whilst a robust response would be made to the Government he did not hold out much hope for a significant change to the proposals now outlined.

A number of members expressed concerns at the impact that the proposals would have on Leicestershire Schools who were already amongst the lowest funded in the country and the potential risk to the viability of small schools.

Some members of the Committee expressed their concern at the use of the word 'disproportionate' in recommendation (b) (iii) and suggested this be deleted.

It was moved by Mr Snartt and seconded by Mr O'Shea:-

That the Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported the proposed response to the consultation as set out in the report and the appendices thereto'

The motion was put and carried, five members voting for the motion, no members voting against and with five members abstaining.

62. Quarter 3 2016/17 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families which provided an update on the Children and Families Service performance and the end of quarter 3 of 2016/17. A copy of the report, marked Agenda Item 12, is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman advised the Committee that Mr Perry, a co-opted member of the Committee who was unable to attend the meeting today had asked a question about why the Ofsted inspection outcomes for schools were above average when attainment at some key stages were below average. A written response had been produced and tabled at the meeting, and a copy filed with these minutes.

Members were advised that the figures shown in paragraph 10 of the report were the most up to date and these superseded the figures in the appendix to the report. A revised appendix would be circulated to members.

Replying to questions from members, the Director advised:-

- a) Whilst he did not think there would be a significant difference in the performance of maintained schools against those that were academies such information could be provided to members if required;
- b) Given the cohort of children in residential care is quite low a national project is underway to look into the academic performance of such children and its findings were due soon;
- c) The early years strategy currently under development would reference the importance of physical activity as an important contributor to improving educational performance as well as promoting health and wellbeing.

RESOLVED:-

That the report be noted.

63. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on the 5th June 2017 at 1.30pm.

11.00-12.50
13.30-15.05
6th March 2017

Chairman