

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 11 September 2017.

PRESENT

Mrs. A. Wright CC (in the Chair)

Mr. J. Kaufman CC

Mrs. C. Lewis

Mrs. R. Page CC

Mrs H. L. Richardson CC

Mrs B. Seaton CC

Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC

Mrs D. Taylor CC

Mr. G. Welsh CC

14. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2017 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

15. Question Time.

The following question, received under Standing Order 35, was put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Question by Ms Sue Whiting, resident:

“Statistics released by the Government on 27th July 2017 show that Leicestershire primary schools had 699 identified children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty) in the academic year 2016-2017. Parents still contact me about lack of provision in Leicestershire primary schools for teaching dyslexic children.

Could the chair please tell me what arrangements have been made for dyslexia awareness week 2nd-8th October to involve primary schools and parents?”

Reply by the Chairman:

“This year during Dyslexia Awareness Week, the Learning Support Service is planning to run a dyslexia awareness workshop for Leicestershire schools. This will include information about dyslexia and will showcase/demonstrate some multi-sensory approaches and resources for use at targeted level for pupils who require extra support. The event will also include a question/surgery slot for attendees to ask questions on an individual basis. There will be at least seven qualified specialist dyslexia tutors present to facilitate this session. This will take place on Tuesday 3rd October 2017 at County Hall.”

Ms Sue Whiting asked the following supplementary question in relation to the question:

“Are parents and children going to be invited to the workshops?”

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

16. 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).

17. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

18. 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.

Mrs D Taylor CC declared a personal interest in all items on the agenda as her step grandson was subject to care services in Leicester City.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

20. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

21. Funding Requirements to deliver the OFSTED Continuous Improvement Plan.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families concerning progress to date and future funding requirements to deliver the OFSTED Continuous Improvement Plan. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 9" is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Members were informed that the proposed investment was significant but necessary to meet the recommendations in the OFSTED report. Whilst being mindful of the financial situation facing the Council, the investment would provide a good basis for addressing the OFSTED recommendations to achieve the 'good' rating from OFSTED;
- ii. OFSTED did not give a definitive standard for Social Worker caseloads. The County Council would aim to follow the standards set out by CIPFA and best practice of Authorities who had been rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by OFSTED;
- iii. The County Council would seek to introduce manageable caseloads for social workers to address the OFSTED recommendations as this was crucial in moving to a 'good' rating from OFSTED. Caseloads would be audited to ensure that there was consistency and good quality outcomes;

- iv. The number of Looked After Children had increased significantly since 2010/11, as had the complexity of the cases involved. This required a properly financed legal service to meet demand and, as such, a sum of £500,000 had been included in the request to Cabinet;
- v. Outline timeframes were included in the Action Plan now presented to the Committee. If the request for investment was approved by Cabinet, then the action plan would be amended to include more detailed timelines and milestones.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 15 September 2017 and that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supports the approval of the growth bid for Children and Family Services for £2.5m for the 2018/19 financial year;
- b. That the Director for Children and Family Services submit a report to the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out details of timeframes and milestones related to the actions in the OFSTED Continuous Improvement Plan.

22. Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016/17.

The Committee considered a report of the Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board concerning the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016/17. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 10" is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The final report would be presented to Cabinet on 15 September 2017 and would be signed off by the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board at its meeting on 20 October 2017;
- ii. There was strong partnership working across Leicestershire regarding Child Sexual Exploitation; although further improvements could be made in the leadership and governance arrangements by more consistent representation at Board level;
- iii. The changes to the arrangements for safeguarding children brought in by the Children's Social Work Act which came into force in 2017 would be addressed in next year's report; Government guidance was expected in November 2017;
- iv. The additional resource introduced to address the volume of initial assessments had reduced caseloads and improved the quality of assessment;
- v. There had been a rise in the number of home educated children which reflected the regional and national trend. Systems were in place to monitor all children who were home educated, as part of the monitoring systems in place for all children not in education;

- vi. New software was being introduced to support officers with the work already underway to interrogate performance data;
- vii. Safeguarding training programmes and the accreditation of Social Workers was now being introduced as this was highlighted by OFSTED as an area for improvement;
- viii. Another key aspect of the OFSTED report was management oversight and the Chairman of the Board welcomed the investment referred to in the earlier paper (OFSTED Continuous Improvement Plan).
- ix. With regard to concerns about initial health assessments, the Chairman of the Board advised that he had written to all health providers and Clinical Commissioning Groups seeking an update.

RESOLVED:

That the comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 15 September 2017 and that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee noted the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016/17.

23. Quarter 1 2017/18 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families which provided an update on departmental performance at the end of quarter 1 of 2017/18. A copy of the report marked "Agenda Item 11" is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. A range of provision was now offered to support young people with their emotional health and wellbeing needs and plans were in place to further improve performance and quality of service delivery. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to identify Looked After Children who were at risk of developing such difficulties. The completion rate for the SDQ was improving year on year, although officers acknowledged that further improvement was needed;
- ii. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) pilot undertaken during the previous year, provided support to social workers and foster carers who cared for a child with emotional health and wellbeing needs and gave a recommendation around suitable therapy for the child. Members acknowledged that it was important to identify and address such issues early to prevent a cumulative effect moving forward;
- iii. Significant progress had been in reducing the number of children who became subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) for a second or subsequent time. Procedures to ensure resources were in place to support children when they came off a CPP were improving. This included routine auditing of cases by the quality assurance team, close working with Leicestershire Police to address mental health, substance misuse or domestic abuse issues within families which were risk factors for children becoming subject to a Plan; and new investments following the OFSTED inspection;

- iv. Members were assured that officers constantly reviewed performance related to CPPs and were informed that cumulative data over a longer period gave a more accurate reflection of performance than data for quarter 1 only;
- v. Members were informed that the County Council performed well in terms of the number of annual health checks completed, although young people had the right to refuse the offer of a check should they wish. Regarding initial health assessments of children and young people, Members were pleased to hear that 100% of those due last month were completed and noted that this would not be the case for this current month as some young people had refused the health assessment and four children were placed out of county, which brought delays due to working with other health authorities. Not all children received a dental check as some were too young at under 4 years old and others had refused the offer. Members were informed that there was close management and monitoring of each child to ensure that checks were carried out where possible;
- vi. Regarding the variance in performance data for ‘% of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation’ compared to the previous quarter, Members were informed that improvements had been made to the consistency of recording methods. However, the data was also affected by a range of circumstances, including those care leavers who chose to return home but did not have their own room or bed and also those young people who were in custody; both of which were deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation;
- vii. Data related to the rise in the number of children refused an initial assessment for an Education and Health Care Plan had not been included in the performance report for Quarter 1 as updated data was not available.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 1 2017/18 Performance Report be noted.

24. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families concerning the annual report of the Independent Reviewing Officer with regard to children in care and those subject to child protection planning, for the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017. A copy of the report marked “Agenda Item 12” is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A more robust system, with increased management oversight, had been introduced to manage the process of ending a Child Protection Plan (CPP); a number of criteria must be met before a Plan could end. Members were assured that the improvements introduced would positively impact on the process for ending a CPP, although it would take some time for this to be reflected in the performance data;
- ii) Officers worked closely with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), who now had a more strengthened and robust position within the Children and Families

Department. The IRO was involved at the closure stage of a CPP and ensured that the correct resources were in place moving forward;

- iii) A recent audit of CPPs which were due to end had been undertaken to identify best practice in managing plans and supporting children; the lessons learned would be used to target appropriate support and preventative action for Children in Need;
- iv) Following the OFSTED inspection, Officers had developed appropriate methods of communicating with Children in Care which encouraged them to engage with and participate in the review process;
- v) Regarding the challenges detailed in section 1.7 of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2016-17, Members were informed that a more robust system was in place, which included a review of all children in care who were subject to a S20 voluntary accommodation arrangement and the requirement for Social Workers to present to the Permanence Panel details of plans for the child concerned;
- vi) A formal process had been developed for Special Guardianship Orders and this would be operational from January 2018.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2016-17 be noted;
- b. That the Child Protection Panel be recommended to consider the current arrangements and process for transitioning children from a child protection plan at a future meeting.

25. Leicestershire Fostering and Adoption Service Statutory Quality Assurance and Performance Reports 2016 - 2017.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families which detailed the activity of the Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency and the Leicestershire Fostering Service during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. A copy of the report marked "Agenda Item 13" is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) The County Council operated a good quality and efficient adoption service, which was more cost effective than other local authority areas. More adoptive families were being sought so as to achieve best outcomes for children and young people. An additional 70 adoptive families were required to meet demand for placements and achieve a good match for children and work to recruit these was well underway and making good progress;
- ii) Members were informed that the ethnicity of foster carers reflected the ethnic mix of the children and young people seeking placements; this enabled their cultural and language needs to be met;
- iii) Officers worked closely with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and provided a good package of support to foster carers which included

individual training programmes, dedicated placement support and an out of hours support line. The recruitment campaign to attract new foster carers included more promotion of the support available to them;

- iv) The funding available to foster carers varied and reflected the skill level of the fosterer carer required, the complexity and need of the child and the circumstances of the placement. Recently, new foster carers had come forward from outside of Leicestershire, prompted by the good quality support offered to foster carers by the County Council. Plans were in place to develop the service further in the future to continue to attract foster carers;
- v) Officers had found it increasingly difficult to find placements for children, and looked to a wide variety of solutions to do so, which included the use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). A specialist consultant was being used to support officers in developing and expanding the in-house fostering service to ensure that demand could be met and where possible the use of more costly IFA placements be avoided. Good progress was being made and the Children and Families Service was confident of meeting its growth targets.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the activity and performance of the Leicestershire Fostering and Adoption Service during the period 2016-17 be noted;
- b. That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee detailing plans to expand and develop the in-house fostering service.

26. 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:

- 13 November 2017
- 15 January 2018
- 5 March 2018
- 4 June 2018
- 10 September 2018
- 12 November 2018

2.00pm – 4.35pm
11 September 2017

CHAIRMAN