

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 5 March 2018.

PRESENT

(in the Chair)

Mr. D. C. Bill MBE CC
Dr. P. Bremner CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mrs. R. Page CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC
Mrs D. Taylor CC

In Attendance.

Mr I D Ould CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services
Mr T Pendleton CC, Cabinet Support Member

52. Election of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Mrs B Seaton CC as Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2018 be noted.

Mrs B Seaton CC – In the Chair

53. Election of Deputy Chairman.

RESOLVED:-

That Mrs D Taylor CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2018.

54. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2018 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

55. 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 from Mrs Sue Whiting

'Could the Chairman please tell me how many appeals for school places have been heard since September 2017 for children in the following categories:-

- Early Years Foundation
- Key Stage 1
- Key Stage 2
- Key Stage 3
- Key Stage 4

Have any children been involved in more than 1 appeal before a school place is allocated?

Reply by Mrs B Seaton CC:-

Key Stage	Year	Appeals Heard
Key Stage 1	Reception	10
	Year 1	10
	Year 2	8
Key Stage 2	Year 3	8
	Year 4	3
	Year 5	8
	Year 6	4
Key Stage 3	Year 7	8
	Year 8	9
	Year 9	5
Key Stage 4	Year 10	5

We do not hold the information requested for the second part of the question. What we do know is that of the above, 14 primary children have been involved in more than one appeal but not necessarily offered a place after appeal.

Mrs Whiting asked a supplementary question to the effect that she was concerned about the number of school appeals and queried how many were heard by the County Council each day.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded to the effect that the exact number was not readily available but that Leicestershire was experiencing an increasing number of applications into the system, both first time applications and mid-term applications to change schools.

56. 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).

57. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

58. 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.

No such declarations were made.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

60. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

A petition had been received under Standing Order 36 but as this related to the Early Help Review (minute 62 refers) the Chairman indicated that she would consider the petition under that agenda item.

61. Quarter 3 2017/18 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update on the performance of the Children and Family Services Department at the end of quarter 3 of 2017/18. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) It was confirmed that referrals where a young person was felt to be at risk from Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) could come from a family member, member of the public or from any agency that had involvement with the young person. The referral process was publicised on both the County Council website and through posters. There would be a National CSE Awareness Day in March which the County Council would also participate in and publicise.
- (ii) The indicators in the quarterly performance report related to the Council's statutory reporting requirements. They also formed part of the performance information in the Ofsted Action Plan, although this contained additional information on a range of topics which were not measured nationally. The Ofsted Action Plan would be the subject of a report to the next meeting of the Committee. The Director indicated that it would be possible to review the content of the performance report considered by the Committee to ensure that it remained focused and relevant to its work.
- (iii) The indicator regarding reducing reoffending rates was addressed by the work of the Youth Offending Service, which supported young people at risk of offending and reoffending and could undertake intensive intervention to prevent a young person from re-offending.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Children and Family Services Department at the end of quarter 3 of 2017/18 be noted.

62. Consultation on the Proposed Early Help Review.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its views on the proposed changes to the Early Help Service. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee also received a presentation from the Director of Children and Family Services which provided additional information regarding the current location and usage of Children's Centres and Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF) Centres, areas of deprivation and the proposed location and rationale for the proposed family centres. A copy of the slides forming the presentation is filed with these minutes.

The Committee then considered a petition, signed by 204 people and presented by Councillor Mary Draycott, Lead Petitioner, in the following terms:-

"We oppose Leicestershire County Council's proposal to close the Cobden Sure Start Centre, Hastings Ward, Loughborough".

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Draycott set out her objections to the proposal. In summary, she felt that Children's Centres provided valuable services which benefitted vulnerable and potentially vulnerable people. Closing them would have a disproportionate impact on women and children in areas of deprivation and poverty. She also felt that, through cutting preventative work, there could be additional service pressures and costs to mainstream care service in the long term.

The Committee also noted that a representation had been received from 'Save Our Children's Centres Leicestershire', a group of Leicestershire parents, volunteers and community groups who were concerned about the proposed closure of 24 Children's Centres across Leicestershire. A copy of this representation is filed with the minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member advised that he was seeking to influence the Government with regard to its proposal to cease the Troubled Families Grant in 2020, especially as the programme, called 'Supporting Leicestershire Families' in Leicestershire, had been very successful. However, he felt that the County Council was acting correctly in planning for the funding to be withdrawn.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) Given the financial pressures that were facing the County Council, members felt that the proposed changes to the early help service represented the best option to provide a sustainable service in the future. It was understood that the removal of a building would not prevent services from being provided in that area. There was a need to balance a reduction in the number of buildings with savings from the staffing budget, so as to have the least impact on service provision. Through integrating four separate services, there would be some opportunities for efficiencies through reduced management and back office staff, thus providing further protection to frontline services.
- (ii) It was recognised that the requirement for the Early Help Review to make a £3 million through staffing reductions would mean that thresholds for accessing the early help service would have to be reviewed. The service would become more targeted and would see a reduction in the number of families it could support, estimated at 290 families.
- (iii) The costs that had been provided in Appendix 3 to the report related to the total running costs for the buildings and would depend on the size of the building and the other activities that were provided from it. It would be possible for a breakdown of these figures to be provided.

- (iv) The deprivation level of Braunstone Town did not include the area of Braunstone in Leicester City, although it was possible that City residents used the Braunstone Town Children's Centre. It was suggested that further consideration be given to the Braunstone area to ensure that deprivation was fully taken into account.
- (v) A view was expressed that Children's Centres were important buildings for local communities, especially where there was a level of deprivation in the area. However, the Committee was reminded that not all areas currently had access to a Children's Centre and that current location was not based on deprivation levels. It was proposed that, for the new model, the hub and spoke buildings would be located in areas where there was a high density of early help service users. Where service users were not able to travel to services, transport or an outreach service could be provided.
- (vi) The proposed location of the hubs had been chosen to take into account their role as a base for members of staff, from which outreach work could be delivered in communities. Group work and other building based services would also be delivered from the hubs. The spokes would only be used for delivery of services and would generally be smaller buildings. In both Loughborough and Coalville, it was proposed there would be hub as well as a spoke building in fairly close proximity. This was because there was a large number of service users in these areas and the locations were felt to be accessible.
- (vii) One of the proposed ways in which services would be delivered in the new model was through renting rooms in community centres. The cost of this was not yet known, but it would not outweigh the cost of running a building. It was confirmed that, where health services were provided from a Children's Centre, this was on the basis that it was a shared community building rather than a tenancy arrangement. The health service would address this in its response to the consultation. Where Children's Centres were located in community libraries, work was being undertaken with the library to understand the impact that withdrawal of services would have.
- (viii) Alternative options for the buildings that the County Council was proposing to cease using were being considered. For example, where the buildings were on school sites, discussions with the schools were taking place to see if they could use the buildings for early years provision. The terms of the Government grant that had been used to create Children's Centres required 60 percent of the buildings' use to be for early years so this could help ensure that the terms of the grant continued to be met. It was recognised that this might not be possible but the risk of clawback of the grant was not considered to be significant. In any case, the savings would be achieved through a reduction in the ongoing revenue costs of the service and would not be affected by any clawback of capital funding from the Government.
- (ix) Some concern was expressed that the Impact Team, which was part of the Youth Offending Service and dealt with low-level anti-social behaviour, was included in the Early Help Review, particularly as any reductions in this area would result in increased pressure on the Police. However, the Committee was advised that no decision had been made regarding whether savings would be required from the Impact Team.

RESOLVED:-

That the Cabinet be advised of the views of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed changes to the Early Help Service.

63. In-House Fostering Service.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided details of the progress made with expanding and developing the Fostering Service during 2017-18. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee welcomed the positive approach with which work had been undertaken to expand and develop the Fostering Service. In particular, the Service had identified through consultation feedback that there were not enough opportunities for short breaks. The need to allow foster carers to have similar opportunities for respite as families of a child with disabilities would be treated as a priority.

The Service tried to work with extended family members wherever possible to prevent a young person from being taken into care. Extended family members could become 'connected carers' and the Service had allocated additional funding to assess the suitability of family members for this role. External assessors were used where the family member was not local.

RESOLVED:-

That the progress made with expanding and developing the Fostering Service during 2017-18 be noted.

64. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (Send) Strategy 2017 to 2020.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its views on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2017 – 2020. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) Members were pleased to note that there was a wealth of provision of local services to support children with SEND and their families, both through mainstream schools and area special schools. The development of resource bases in mainstream schools meant that more children and young people could be supported in this way. The level of spend on independent provision was still high but it was expected that the actions linked to the Strategy would help to reduce it.
- (ii) The Committee welcomed the Strategy's principle to promote inclusion across all services and sectors. This was particularly important in the context of a whole life approach. The Committee was also pleased to note that the Strategy provided an honest appraisal of both strengths and weaknesses and set out actions to address areas which were not working well.
- (iii) The Children and Families Service worked with all children and young people with SEND to prepare them for adulthood. This included identifying the outcomes they

wanted to meet and developing a range of provision to support their achievement. Only a small number would require continued services from Adult Social Care and work was undertaken with the Adults and Communities Department to support transition.

- (iv) The Department had worked well to ensure that Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) were issued in timescale. It would now be important to co-produce EHCPs with families and to ensure that they were of good quality.

RESOLVED:-

That the Cabinet be advised of the views of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy 2017 to 2020.

65. Fire Safety in Leicestershire Maintained Schools and Academies.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Service which advised of the actions taken to ensure the continued safety of pupils and other occupants of Leicestershire maintained schools and academies following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) The Fire Safety Policy would set out the County Council's level of expectation, types of sprinkler systems that could be used and how they might work, and other types of fire safety measures that were required. It was noted that the County Council had to issue a licence to anyone wanting to work on an academy site where the County Council was the landowner and could use this to require compliance with the policy.
- (ii) It was noted that Lubbethorpe School was the first that would be built by landowners and then become an academy, and might not therefore pass into County Council ownership. Although the landowners could not be forced to comply with the Fire Safety Policy, the Committee was pleased to note that they were working proactively with the County Council in this area.
- (iii) The Committee was assured that Leicestershire had strong resilience arrangements and would be able to respond appropriately during and after an emergency. The response to the recent explosion at Hinckley Road, Leicester had demonstrated the strength of the resilience partnership's arrangements.

RESOLVED:-

That the actions taken to ensure the continued safety of pupils and other occupants of Leicestershire maintained schools and academies following the Grenfell Tower tragedy be noted.

66. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 4 June at 1.30pm.

1.30 - 3.47 pm
05 March 2018

CHAIRMAN