

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 4 July 2018.

PRESENT

Mrs B. Seaton CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. W. Liquorish CC

Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC
Mrs. A. Hack CC

In Attendance.

Mr. I. D. Ould CC, Lead Member for Children and Families
Mrs. D. Taylor CC, Cabinet Support Member

15. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Question Time.

The following two questions, received under Standing Order 35, were put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1) Question from Mrs Shirely Dudfield

'In view of the County Council setting up a Family Wellbeing Service, has any consideration been given to alternative provision for children excluded from, or at risk of exclusion from, primary schools? Many primary schools are having to use education budgets to manage pupil behaviour issues and this does not seem to be an appropriate use of funding'.

Reply from Mrs B Seaton CC

'The Family Wellbeing Service will bring together our Early Help Services and support families with children between the ages of 0 and 19. Support for children excluded from, or at risk of exclusion from, Primary Schools is provided through the Oakfield Short Stay School and outreach offer. The current Early Help Services work alongside this provision to provide family support, where required, to children who are excluded or at risk of exclusion'.

Mrs Dudfield asked a supplementary question around whether Oakfield Short Stay School had the capacity to cope with the 1,600 exclusions from primary schools each year?

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded that exclusion rates in Leicestershire were exceptionally low, and it was possible that the

figure of 1,600 includes fixed term exclusions. Currently, the provision offered through Oakfield, both in terms of the outreach as well as the work done in schools, was adequate to support the primary sector. However, this was an area that was being looked at in terms of future proofing and ensuring that appropriate resources were in place.

2) Question from Mrs Sue Whiting

‘According to the official reply, in 2017, the events held at County Hall during Dyslexia Awareness Week follow a 3 year cycle:-

2015 Children and Families

2016 School Governors

2017 SENDCOs and professional teachers

Therefore it would appear to be the turn of Children and Families in 2018. The theme is 21st Century Dyslexia with an overarching focus of Enabling Technologies so could the Chair please tell me what preparations are being made for the Event during Dyslexia Awareness Week 1st October – 7th October 2018?’

Reply by Mrs B Seaton CC

‘Initial planning and preparations have begun for a family and schools information event to take place during Dyslexia Awareness Week (1st to 7th October 2018). It is hoped that this will be an open, informal event. Exact details are not yet established.’

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 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.

No declarations were made.

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 one petition had been received under Standing Order 36.

As the petition related to an item for discussion elsewhere on the agenda (minute 22 refers), it was agreed the petition would be dealt with under that item.

22. Early Help Review - Family Wellbeing Service (0-19).

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services seeking the Cabinet's approval to reduce the number of Children's Centres from 36 to 18 and to redesign the various elements of the Council's Early Help Services for children and young people into an integrated family and wellbeing service for 0-19 years. A copy of the Cabinet report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director of Children and Family Services drew the Committee's attention to the results of the public consultation and the final proposals for the Family Wellbeing Service. Attention was also drawn to the financial pressures faced by the service and the Committee was advised that there was currently no indication that there would be additional national funding made available to address these.

The Chairman invited Mrs Liz Blackshaw to present her petition entitled 'Save Our Children's Centre', containing 4,283 signatures. In presenting the petition, Mrs Blackshaw commented that although it was pleasing to see that the County Council had reconsidered its position in relation to the number of children's centres no longer being used by the service, it was disappointing that this was only a further six Children's Centres. Mrs Blackshaw stressed the difficulties faced by some families due to the distance to their nearest Children's Centre, and also explained the overall importance of the centres to the children and families who used them.

Mr. I. D. Ould CC, the Cabinet Lead Member, advised the Committee that he was confident in the proposals set out in the report. He noted that the quality of work provided by Children's Centres was not in question but praised officers for developing the concept of a new 0-19 family wellbeing service, informed by the success of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme. He confirmed that he was lobbying at a national level for the funding of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme to continue beyond 2020.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- i) Members welcomed the extra funding that had been found and were pleased to note that concerns raised during the consultation period had been taken into account in the development of the final proposal. Assurance was given that colleagues across the Council recognised the difficulties facing the Children and Families Service and were supportive of the development of the new Family Wellbeing Service. There was a confidence in the robustness and sustainability of the new service.
- ii) Lots of work was being undertaken to mitigate the risk around disabilities, for example, by spreading the location of the buildings around the county as much as possible. Consideration had been given to the alternative provision which could be used if the demand was there. The aim was to create a more flexible service focussed on providing targeted services to the most vulnerable children and families.

- iii) The importance of ensuring that a robust model was in place to continue to support those with disabilities in travelling to a Children's Centre was stated. This was highlighted by the Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment. It was confirmed that consideration had been given to where current users lived and where they would be able to access services. Where appropriate, service users were already supported to access children's centres. This would continue and where it was not possible, provision would be delivered at home.
- iv) In response to a query around the continuing use of volunteers, reassurance was given that the ongoing strategy would ensure that the existing volunteer base would be retained. It was hoped that there would be a greater use of volunteers operating certain provision from community venues, for example continuing community networks to allow parents to connect with others from their locality to prevent loneliness.
- v) It was noted that the Health service was present in many of the Children's Centres and it was queried whether there was the possibility of approaching Health for a financial contribution to the service post 2020. Discussions were currently ongoing with a number of partners, including Health, and part of this involved partner contributions.
- vi) Consideration had been given to capital clawback figures so that the potential risk was known. Dependent on the decision made by the Cabinet, work would take place towards identifying the future use for those buildings which would no longer be used by the service. A clear analysis would be undertaken to assess the capital clawback risk, but there was confidence that the risk would be significantly mitigated, particularly if it was possible to continue to use the buildings for early years provision. For those buildings that would still be used by the service, assurance was given that they would be able to cope with the increased footfall and would be able to provide greater flexibility to service users.
- vii) The national Troubled Families Programme was due to end in 2019/20, but it was noted that Leicestershire was one of the highest performing authorities in terms of meeting the requirements of the national programme. It was currently not known whether the national programme would continue and there would be a significant funding gap if it did not. The proposed Family Wellbeing Service would incorporate a number of services, including Supporting Leicestershire Families, into an integrated early help service which would reduce duplication and take forward the most successful elements of each service.
- viii) Due to the nature of early help services, it could be difficult to monitor outcomes. However, the Committee was advised that the service provided by children's centres received high rates of satisfaction. In addition, data was now being collected on the trajectory for children using the children's centres. This would provide a useful resource in the future.

The Committee supported the proposals within the Cabinet report, and agreed that this would ensure that there was targeted help for vulnerable children and that the service would be able to support Leicestershire families in the future.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That the Cabinet be advised of the views of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposals for a Family Wellbeing Service.

23. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 10 September 2018 at 1.30pm.

1.30 – 2.37pm
04 July 2018

CHAIRMAN