

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 5 March 2019.

PRESENT

Mrs B. Seaton CC (in the Chair)

Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC
Mr. D. Harrison CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC

Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC

In Attendance

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

65. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2019 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

At the last meeting, it had been agreed that a letter would be sent to the Department for Education (DfE) expressing the concerns of the County Council over the school admission criteria (Minute Number 62 refers). Confirmation was given that this letter was in the process of being finalised and a copy would be circulated to members of the Committee once it had been sent to the DfE.

66. Question Time.

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

67. 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).

68. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

69. 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 declarations were made.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

71. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

72. Evaluation of Early Help Services.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the findings in relation to an evaluation of the Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF) team, and highlighted a number of areas of current performance. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) The evaluation of the early help service had demonstrated where it worked well with families and also where there were areas for development. It was the intention that the new service would build on earlier levels of intervention, for example guided self-help approaches such as online resources and opportunities for families to attend drop-in sessions, whilst maintaining a focus on the families with the most complex needs. Work was taking place across the department, with children's social care, to consider what training was required for staff to ensure there was early intervention.
- ii) The budget for the SLF programme was a pooled budget, made up of money from a number of partners and the Troubled Families Programme. More recently, the only contributions had been from the district councils and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), and as of 1 April 2019 the only partner contribution would be from the OPCC, along with the Troubled Families funding. Concern was expressed that the district councils were no longer contributing to the pooled budget, Although reassurance was given that the district councils remained very supportive of the programme, it was suggested that a discussion should take place around the possibility of them re-engaging financially.
- iii) The national Troubled Families funding was due to end in November 2020, and concern was raised around the possibility of the national payment by results funding not being replaced. As part of the review of services, £1.5m had been taken from the early help services through the closure of children's centre buildings and the reorganisation of four services into one, which had reduced the number of managers and enabled the same level of front line staff to be maintained. The Troubled Families Programme was due to end in March 2020 but the funding currently in the pooled budget would be sufficient to fund the service until November 2020. If no future funding was received, there would be a shortfall of £2.3m in the County Council's early help services. This equated to approximately 29% of the front line staff and would lead to a reduction in the workforce. This would have a significant impact on the number of families who could be supported and the ability to deliver services. There was currently no confirmation in relation to future funding from the Troubled Families

programme. Various lobbying was taking place nationally but no indication had yet been given to a time frame for a decision.

- iv) Members noted with concern that a reduction in early help front line staff could ultimately create additional costs due to a greater number of families having more complex needs which required social care intervention. The evaluation report on early help services had provided evidence that early intervention had a significant positive impact on families and reduced the pressure on social care.

The Lead Member for Children and Family Services praised the staff within the early help service, in particular the range of challenging work that they were undertaking with families.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

73. Leicestershire's New Safeguarding Arrangements 2019.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services setting out the proposals for the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to replace the current Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board by September 2019. The new arrangements were required by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) It was reported that the budget to support the arrangements for 2019/20 had now been agreed by partners.
- ii) Some of the key principles for the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements set out what success would look like, but ultimately this was that children were safeguarded and that partners were assured that organisations were effectively safeguarding children.
- iii) Working Together 2018 clearly stipulated the need for independent scrutiny in order to ensure external challenge of the arrangements. The new arrangements would be underpinned by the key principles and as part of the independent scrutiny, consideration would be given to how well this was being undertaken by the statutory partners. The role of the Cabinet Lead Member and the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee also formed part of the local arrangements for external challenge.
- iv) Effective communication between partners was crucial. A strategic approach around the work in relation to safeguarding was being taken and all partners would have a role to play. Consideration was being given to how the priorities of the associated Partnership Boards linked together and made reference to the new arrangements. It was suggested that a communications protocol should be developed; this would be considered, particularly where there were shared roles across the Boards.

- v) Although the governance arrangements related to Leicestershire and Rutland, some of the statutory partners worked across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. As a result, work would take place with Leicester City where possible to ensure consistency with the arrangements.
- vi) It was suggested that, although the safeguarding partners had a requirement to publish a report at least once every 12 months, the Committee should receive an update on progress with the new arrangements sooner than this. The new arrangements had to be implemented by September 2019, and it was therefore agreed to provide the Committee with an update within the first year of operation.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That an update on the progress of the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements be presented to the Committee within the first year of operation.

74. Update on Complaints Handling within Children and Family Services.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on complaints received and responded to within the Children and Family Services department during 2018-19. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) In response to a query, it was stated that any learning and key themes arising from complaints should be considered collaboratively. Ultimately, it was the responsibility of the department to take forward any issues and to implement any learning and change. A revised approach for dealing with the learning from complaints had been developed to ensure that this was shared with staff and to consider improvements. It was noted that the department was now responding to complaints with more rigour, both in terms of timeliness and how it was learning from complaints.
- ii) It was acknowledged that the number of complaints was increasing along with the time taken to deal with complaints. An area of improvement, however, was that the department now resolved complaints at an earlier stage through better communication. This was evident from the decrease of cases escalating from Stage 1 to Stage 2.
- iii) A point was raised that, considering the amount of services delivered across the county, the number of complaints received was relatively low. Assurance was given that the department took all complaints very seriously and would always respond to them, particularly where it was a complaint around something that the department had control over. Following the last Ofsted inspection, lots of work had been undertaken that should contribute to reducing the number of complaints and this was still taking effect. It was noted however that if there was a further significant increase in the number of complaints, the Committee would be very concerned. The Director agreed with this, but felt that consideration needed to be given to the context in which the department

now worked, for example changes in legislation, and how this had changed the context of complaints.

- iv) Although the number of compliments had decreased, this was largely down to them not being formally recorded. Staff were complimented regularly, and improvements were needed around ensuring that these were passed on to the appropriate department.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

75. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 4 June 2019 at 2.00pm.

21.30 – 2.38pm
05 March 2019

CHAIRMAN