

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 3 September 2019.

PRESENT

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC (in the Chair)

Dr. T. Eynon CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Mrs. C. Lewis
Mrs. R. Page CC

Mr T. Parton CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC
Mrs. A. Wright CC

In Attendance.

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

18. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2019 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

19. Question Time.

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

20. 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).

21. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

22. 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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

24. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

25. Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The Committee considered a report of the Independent Chair of the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board presenting the draft Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board (LRLSCB) for 2018/19. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes. Any comments or proposed additions and amendments would be addressed in the final report before it was published.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were made:

- i) The LRLSCB would cease on 25 September 2019 and would be replaced by multi-agency safeguarding arrangements which would be managed through a new Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership. Operationally, it was the intention that there would be little difference to what was currently in place; the most significant change was that there would now be equal and joint responsibility between the statutory partners. The final details were currently being agreed but the aim was to build on existing practices and to streamline these to avoid duplication. A report had been presented to the last meeting of the Committee around the new arrangements – this would be recirculated.
- ii) In response to a query, it was stated that the new Partnership arrangements would build on what was already being undertaken well and, should any disagreements between the core partners occur, mechanisms would be in place to prevent this. It had also been agreed to continue to have an Independent Advisor and their role would be to provide independent advice and scrutiny and to chair the Partnership meetings.
- iii) Concern was expressed by a member around the increase in the number of children who were electively home educated. It was noted that this increase could be attributed to a number of reasons, not least because the department was now better at collecting information about the young people. The way this was recorded had changed and the department was able to access the information more readily. It was noted that parents made a decision or moved their child as a result of feeling that schools weren't meeting their child's needs; this could raise concern within the department but the additional monitoring enabled the department to work with schools and parents to better meet the child's needs. Reassurance was given around the robust monitoring and the work being undertaken with schools by the Inclusion Team, but this would continue to be an area of focus.
- iv) Concern was also raised that over a fifth of children who went missing in Leicestershire and Rutland were looked after children placed in the county from other areas. It was noted that this group of children provided a significant challenge and work continued with partners to ensure awareness of these children when they were placed, the potential challenges that they may be experiencing and to ensure that there was a joint approach to support the

children. Lots of partnership working currently took place with the Police as a large number of young people were subject to vulnerabilities such as going missing and links to child sexual exploitation. The new partnership arrangements would seek to enhance the existing joint working with the Police and Health. The issues of missing and elective home education had been identified as key areas that would continue to be considered and monitored by the new Partnership.

- v) In response to a query, a key focus was to improve engagement with schools and the voluntary sector. Discussions were currently taking place around how this could be achieved and how to promote messages within schools. In terms of the voluntary and community sector, consideration was being given to identifying the best way to engage with this diverse group.
- vi) It was noted that the Board budget for 2019/20 no longer included funding for Serious Case Reviews. Confirmation was given that the Board had sufficient reserves to support any current Serious Case Reviews. Under the new arrangements, these would be replaced by Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and there would be different approaches to ensure that any learning was received and distributed in a more timely manner. Agreement had been reached for the 2019/20 budget for the new Partnership and this included an agreed amount for Reviews. Discussions were currently taking place between partners around the budget for future years. It was stated that there was a rigorous process to determine the route for a case and to disseminate the learning from cases, and the Cabinet Lead Member provided reassurance that potential cases were discussed prior to them reaching the formal Serious Case Review stage.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

26. Early Years.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work taking place across the county to support children in their early years. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) In response to a query around financial pressures, the difficulties being faced by providers through the take up of free early education entitlement (FEEE) was highlighted. It was noted that it was becoming more difficult to balance budgets, partly due to the significant on-costs providers were faced with. It was also stated that providers were having to promote the use of FEEE in order to attract parents to use their provision.
- ii) Concern was raised by a member that there was the danger of those not using FEEE effectively subsidising the children under the scheme or providers refusing to accept children as it would not be financially viable. It was acknowledged that the amount of money the government provided per hour for FEEE children in Leicestershire did not always cover the cost per hour for the sector to deliver what was required. The money from fee paying parents was

not being used to subsidise the scheme, but providers were concerned that they would not be able to afford to deliver the free education entitlement. It appeared that there hadn't been a significant element of turning children away from provision in Leicestershire, but the funding levels did not support the funding requirements for the early years sector.

- iii) There had been a significant rise in the number of referrals made to the Early Years SEND advisors. There was now a much better understanding of SEND issues and services were now aligned to better respond to demand. However, there was still an issue with the number of referrals. A SEND Board now existed, which gave parents the opportunity to express their views, and an example was given of a positive outcome as a result of intensive support from the team.
- iv) The Committee was pleased to note that the Early Years Autism Team would broaden its remit to better support those children who had not yet been diagnosed but had an identified need relating to social communication and sensory processing. A review of the Early Years Childcare Service had been undertaken and brought in the 0-5 specialist teaching service, a component of which was staff who were skilled in working with children with autism. The diagnosis of autism was not as prevalent in the 0-5 age group but the decision had been to look at the skill set of this service and develop a more responsive approach. Young people would be identified through an assessment undertaken at the setting they were in and through conversations with parents and families. The aim was to remove the barrier of having a 'label' as a result of a diagnosis from health. In terms of working with the young children, the special needs teaching service skill set was being spread across a wide range of staff and if a child did arrive in a setting with a 'label' the staff would be ready to work with them. It was currently unknown whether this would have an impact on the number of children who would be electively home educated, but there was greater vigilance in the system to better respond to the children who were known to the Inclusion Service.
- v) It was highlighted that 72% of eligible two year olds had taken up the FEEE and of these, 96% accessed good and outstanding provision. Departmental casework management provided an oversight of performance in all areas of the service and there was confidence that there was sufficiency to highlight any concerns around providers.

The Committee thanked the staff for the work undertaken in this area and was satisfied that things were moving in the right direction.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

27. Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the work undertaken to tackle the challenges around the recruitment and retention of social workers and the current position. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) A dedicated strategy for recruitment and retention had been developed, and the implementation plan had identified 24 actions. Of these, 20 had been completed and the remaining four continued to be progressed. One had been an environmental study which had now been completed; a programme of support for managers and senior practitioners in the delivery of group supervision was underway; a commitment to provide training around systemic issues was in-hand but there had been a timing issue; and a review of the senior practitioner role was due to be undertaken as part of the Transformation Unit review of capacity in the department as a whole.
- ii) In response to a query around the continued use of agency staff, it was stated that these were primarily to cover vacancies, maternity leave and long term sickness and also to cover the shortfall in capacity whilst supporting ASYEs. Agreement had been reached around how and where staff numbers would be increased but it was necessary, in some instances, to use agency staff to cover vacancies more immediately. Clear oversight was provided on a monthly basis around the number of agency staff within the department. It was acknowledged that the cost of using agency staff was a pressure and that this would remain, but it was necessary to ensure that cases continued to be managed.
- iii) The department had adopted a 'grow your own' approach to widen the routes into social work. Three Frontline students had now qualified and had joined the workforce as ASYEs – the feedback from these had been very positive. There were also six social work apprentices and as these had already been employed elsewhere within the department, it was considered more likely that they would remain working for the County Council when they had qualified. There was also a high retention rate from the ASYEs. In response to a query, upon completing a qualification with the County Council, it was not possible for the department to tie in staff on a financial basis.
- iv) There had not been a high take up of having an exit interview, although these were not currently compulsory. A number of reasons were given for staff leaving, for example the stress associated with the job, progression, personal reasons and travel, and for some it was financial as other neighbouring authorities offered a much higher salary than Leicestershire was able to provide.

The Cabinet Lead Member reiterated that every effort was being made to sustain or improve worker satisfaction and regular visits took place to the Locality Teams to discuss their issues and concerns. He also commented on the success of the pride in practice events in Melton. He stated that there was an improving picture around recruitment and retention and the work continuing to be undertaken was reassuring. The Lead Member also sought the support of the Committee around the way he would be proposing to fund different areas of the department in the budget.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work and progress of the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Missing and Trafficked Hub. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) The multi-agency team now had a wider brief and it was questioned whether there was a risk that CSE work would get lost. It was reported that when the work and training around criminal exploitation was rolled out, the number of sexual exploitation referrals had decreased and there had been joint referrals for criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation. However, these were closely linked, particularly in terms of recruitment. The service was trying to offer a trusted professional relationship with the child so that they had somewhere to go and someone to talk to.
- ii) In response to a query, there had been an increase in male referrals due to the roll out of 'Breck's Last Game' which was a short film targeted at boys. For child criminal exploitation, the majority of referrals had come from the Youth Offending Service and had also been for boys. However, the majority of referrals received overall had been for females.
- iii) Details were provided around Operation Lionheart and the learning from this. Multi-agency partnership meetings continued to take place in relation to families and children that had been affected by the enforcement. There were a number of vulnerable adults who could potentially receive a lengthy custodial sentence for intent to supply Class A drugs and it was felt that these could be seen as victims of exploitation in the same way as the children and young people. Consideration was being given to a public health model in relation to the violence reduction unit being developed in Leicestershire to look at earlier opportunities for intervention and awareness raising, particularly around preventing the exploitation and isolation of vulnerable families involved in criminal activity. It was felt that the work undertaken through Operation Lionheart should be shared with all Community Safety Partnerships so that it could be disseminated locally and videos were now being produced for localities to show the work being undertaken. The Safer Communities Strategy Board had previously received a presentation on Operation Lionheart and county lines and the Community Safety Partnership representatives on this Board would feed back the information in their local areas.
- iv) A comment was raised by a member that some local Community Safety Partnerships had previously set aside some money to help local schools pay to visit the Warning Zone. It was noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner had committed some funding for this, and work had been taking place to develop a zone on criminal exploitation and to include key safeguarding messages around child criminal exploitation and emotional wellbeing in the existing zones. The Warning Zone also visited older children (aged 10-14) to promote its messages and discussions were taking place with safeguarding leads in further education settings to provide a presentation. A suite of slides had also been provided to Regional CSE leads and this gave them the opportunity to include data relevant to their local area.

- v) The service had been successful in the prevention, identification and pursuit of perpetrators of CSE and retained information around successful prosecutions. It was noted that Leicestershire County Council had been successful in obtaining criminal compensation for 18 young people who had been victims, and this would make a significant difference to their long term life choices.
- vi) The number of reported missing episodes had increased significantly at the end of 2017/18, and this could partly be attributed to improvements in the electronic reporting system as there were more features to identify a missing episode. A further development was the holding of multi-agency strategy meetings if a young person went missing three times over a 90 day period. The biggest cohort of missing continued to be out of area children. In terms of children who went missing once, proportionately this had begun to reduce as had children missing from home. Over the year, the majority had been those missing from home, not from care.
- vii) A member commented that, in some instances, it was necessary for adults and professional to change their perception of the children who were involved in criminal activity, and emphasis was given to looking at the child first and the criminal activity second.
- viii) In relation to gypsy and traveller provision, it had proved to be very difficult to relay messages around criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation and specific neighbourhood police and health colleagues had been used who were familiar to the community. There was a general suspicion around the discussions and a different approach via social media around staying safe online was being attempted.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That a further update be received in six months.

29. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which presented the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer with regard to children in care and those subject to child protection planning. The report evaluated the extent to which Leicestershire County Council had fulfilled its responsibilities to children for the period 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee welcomed the report and was pleased to note the contribution that the service had made to the improvements in the department as a whole.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

30. Quarter 1 2019/20 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update of the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2019 (Quarter 1). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) The number of families recorded as receiving targeted Early Help during quarter 1 was lower than the previous quarter. However, there had been a change in the way that the data was recorded and this did not therefore represent a reduction in the number of families worked with. This would continue to be looked at, but progress towards the payment by results target remained good.
- ii) It was noted that the rate of re-offending per young offender had increased and was in relation to a very small group of young people who had committed a significant number of offences.
- iii) A specific comment was raised in relation to Church of England Key Stage 2 data. This suggested that 74% of children in single academy trusts and 64% in maintained schools had achieved the reading, writing and maths attainment. It was queried whether the expertise in single academy trusts could be used to support the maintained school sector more effectively. A strength in the Leicestershire system was the sharing of expertise around school improvement and ensuring that this expertise was targeted effectively. It was stated that the capacity within the department for school improvement was no longer there, although it did have a significant role in facilitating this and would support the use of expertise in the single academy trusts for the benefit of all.
- iv) There were proposed changes to the Ofsted Inspection Framework to reintroduce the inspection of schools that had previously been rated as outstanding. This was largely due to the fact that a number of outstanding schools which had been re-inspected had been found to be requiring improvement. The more frequent targeting of schools to be inspected was welcomed. The department had developed a team of Education Effectiveness partners to work with all schools, and the more vulnerable schools would be identified to benefit from this expertise in the first instance.

The Committee agreed that the performance was very positive and demonstrated stability in the department.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

31. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 5 November 2019 at 2.00pm.

2.00 – 4.15pm
03 September 2019

CHAIRMAN