

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 3 March 2020.

PRESENT

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

Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC  
Mr. J. Kaufman CC  
Mrs. R. Page CC  
Mr. L. Phillimore CC

Mrs. J. Richards CC  
Mrs B. Seaton CC  
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC

In Attendance.

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

63. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2020 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

64. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

65. 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).

66. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

67. 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.

Mr. L. Phillimore CC declared a personal interest in Minute Number 72 as his wife was employed by Leicestershire County Council in the Early Years Service.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

69. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

70. Children's Social Care Investment Plan.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which set out the proposals for the Children's Social Care Investment Plan to procure four properties and commission a new team to provide a new model of residential care for the most complex and vulnerable children and young people in Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) The Children's Innovation Partnership had been tasked with carrying out a number of design briefs, the first of which related to residential care. The proposed solution contained three elements which would be delivered in two phases – phase one was the recruitment of a new Assessment and Resource Team (ART) and phase two included the development of a Hub containing three assessment beds and three multi-functional properties.
- ii) It was noted that the ART would offer similar provision to the current MISTLE contract provided by Action for Children. This would be decommissioned and the children and young people currently supported within the MISTLE project would transfer to receiving ART support. The County Council, Barnardo's and Action for Children were working together to consider TUPE implications and to ensure continuity of service. The current contract value of MISTLE was £450,000 compared with the annual value of ART of £411,840. However, it was stressed that this had not been developed as a savings initiative but as an opportunity to meet the requirements of the service and improve outcomes for children and young people.
- iii) In response to a query, it was reported that a period of comprehensive design work had been undertaken and this had looked at the current need and the profile of young people being worked with. It was known that more young people with complex needs were coming into the system and a primary driver had been how best to deal with these needs. It was the aim to be able to offer those with the most complex needs a place where they could be adequately assessed. The work being undertaken would ensure that there was the current sufficiency of places and that the young person's needs were being met.
- iv) It had not yet been identified where the properties would be located; a piece of work would be undertaken to ascertain the type of provision required and engagement would take place with the local community and elected members once an appropriate location had been found. However, prior to this, a series of workshops would be held to consider building design and how they could be child needs led and these would involve young people and appropriate stakeholders. It was, as yet, unclear whether the buildings would be bespoke or market available. It was noted that the buildings would be owned by the County Council but managed through Barnardo's, who had significant experience in this area.

- v) As part of the comprehensive design work, consideration had been given to what was required to support this cohort of young people. It had been identified that a multi-disciplinary team was needed to work around young people, either in residential settings or elsewhere. The notional idea of developing the ART had arisen from this. It was acknowledged that the work of MISTLE had been highly successful in stabilising placements and ensuring children returned home. The learning from this had therefore been used to build the ART, with a primary driver of delivering this through a single system.

The Committee noted that a report was being presented to the Cabinet on 24 March 2020 to seek approval to allocate additional capital investment to the programme. It was agreed that an update on progress with the Residential Design Brief be provided to the Committee at its meeting on 1 September and a further progress update be provided in a years' time.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That an update on progress with the Residential Design Brief be provided to the Committee in six months;
- c) That a further progress update be provided to the Committee in a years' time.

71. 16+ Semi Independent Accommodation by External Framework.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the 16+ accommodation and support provided by external framework to Looked After Children aged 16 and 17 years of age. 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 there were 24 Providers on the 16+ Supported Accommodation Framework and there were 96 young people living in 16+ semi-independent accommodation. Concern was raised by a member that these young people did not receive enough supervision, particularly those who placed outside of Leicestershire. It was reported that for some 16 year olds, professionals had concerns about them living in semi-independent accommodation, in particular those who had lived in residential accommodation and had been victims of sexual and criminal exploitation. However, where this was the case, robust arrangements were in place to ensure that officers knew the whereabouts of these young people and this could include initially commissioning 24/7 support during their transition period. Where there were significant issues, the young person would revert to receiving care, not support.
- ii) A range of mechanisms were in place to ensure that young people were kept away from forms of exploitation. The department worked closely with the Home Office in relation to trafficking and modern slavery and there was a protocol in place around how to deal with this. It was stated that East Midlands Airport had also developed a protocol around placing trafficked children and working with relevant authorities.

- iii) Of those living in semi-independent accommodation, 43 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC); 62% of these were placed out of county, with a significant number residing in Leicester City. It was possible to monitor this cohort closely due to the small number and to ensure that they had an appropriate pathway plan. It was noted that UASC were likely to be slightly older and quite often, their status was not resolved by the age of 18. It was therefore not possible for them to move to housing provision until they had a right to remain in the UK as the County Council was responsible for their finances. All UASC were allocated a Personal Advisor, who would work with the young person to develop an appropriate pathway plan to help them with their individual needs and to integrate into the community.
- iv) It was noted that there were national standards around managing children who were placed out of county. The young person remained the responsibility of the home authority who would determine their day to day care and how frequently they were visited by their social worker, based on the needs of the individual young person. If anything critical occurred and there needed to be an investigation, the local authority where the young person was placed would co-ordinate this until the local authority responsible for the young person could deal with it. It was stated that there were approximately 600 young people living in Leicestershire from out of the county; this number was monitored along with the number of beds from external providers. There was also a duty on local placing authorities to write to host authorities to inform them when a young person was residing in their area.
- v) A query was raised in relation to fully understanding the vulnerability of UASC to exploitation. It was stated that all young people had an individual initial assessment to determine their needs and vulnerabilities. For UASC, it could be that little was known to begin with but multi-agency assessments carried out by a variety of organisations ensured that they received appropriate support. Initially, their educational needs were arranged by the Virtual School. There was clear guidance from the Home Office for staff to check that a UASC was the age they were claiming to be; this stated that a five year confidence margin had to be considered when determining their age.
- vi) Costs per week for semi-independent accommodation ranged and one young person was in a Care Quality Commission provision costing £5,625 per week, the cost of which was shared with health. In response to a query, it was reported that there was a clear criteria to follow when health was contributing. The Complex Care Panel would determine the level of contribution and this was largely based on the child's needs.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

72. Early Support and Inclusion for Children with a Special Educational Need and/or a Disability.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update regarding Early Help Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

(SEND) support to families where a child had a special educational need and/or a disability. 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 around how eligible children were identified, it was reported that in many instances, families self-referred to receive support. In order to promote the service, regular newsletters were circulated. It was acknowledged that further work around the clarity of the process was required, although information was provided in the Local Offer, which was in the public domain. The link to this information would be sent to elected members to allow them to forward the information as appropriate.
- ii) It was the ambition to review the Short Breaks Offer to ensure that it was responsive to the needs of families. Although the feedback from families had been very positive, it was felt that there was room for further improvement in systems and processes. The service was working closely with the Parent Carer Forum to consider how the current offer could be improved and this work was being supported by Barnardo's.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

73. Final Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel - Multi-Academy Trusts.

The Committee considered a report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Multi-Academy Trusts which set out the conclusions and recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Review Panel investigation into the structural and operational arrangements of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) managing Leicestershire schools. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

The Children and Family Services Department had a good relationship with MATs; nevertheless there had been a perceived gap in the relationship between local authority elected members and MATs. Members had raised some concerns regarding accountability, engagement and the effectiveness of existing structures. The lack of influence that the local authority had over MATs, whilst understood, had also been a cause for concern.

The Committee felt that this had been a valuable piece of work and supported encouraging elected members to contact their local MATs. The report would be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 24 March 2020 and following approval, the recommendations suggested in the report would be implemented.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That the Cabinet be advised that this Committee welcomes and supports the report.

74. Quarter 3 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services presenting an update of the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period October to December 2019 (Quarter 3). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) Concern was raised around the statistic that only 7% of children in Leicestershire with an Education, Health and Care Plan had reached the expected level in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. It was possible to break this down into individual milestones, but the figure was similar to the statistical neighbour average. It was acknowledged that children with EHCPs had very different learning needs and styles but consideration was being given as to why the percentage was so low.
- ii) The percentage of children who were eligible for Free School Meals who had reached the expected level of Reading, Writing and Mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 was 40%. This had been an improvement on the previous year, but lots of work was taking place to improve this performance and bridge the gap with their peers.
- iii) The performance in relation to placement stability was rated as Red and it was reported that the number of older children being placed into care had impacted on this. Consideration had been given to whether homeless 16/17 year olds were being provided with the right service and it had been concluded that in most cases, the young person had not been given the correct information to make a decision. Consequently, when they had received this information, the young person had decided that they wanted to become looked after; as such, additional teenagers were being placed into care. As there were currently insufficient placements to meet the demand for this age group, there had been an increase in the use of out of hours provision. Due to the way this service operated, it often meant that the older young people coming into care had had a number of placements in a very short space of time.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

75. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 2 June 2020 at 2.00pm.