

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 9 March 2021.

PRESENT

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

Dr. P. Bremner CC	Mr T. Parton CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC	Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC	Mr. G. Welsh CC
Mrs. C. Lewis	Mrs. M. Wright CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC	

In Attendance.

Mrs. D. Taylor CC – Lead Member for Children and Families
Mrs. B. Seaton CC – Cabinet Support Member

45. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

46. Question Time.

The following question, received under Standing Order 34, was put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

(a) Mrs Sue Whiting asked the following question of the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Could the Chair please say how many of the 327 children without a Secondary Placement according to the press release of 1/3/2021 have Special Educational/Health/Social needs?

Mrs H Fryer CC replied as follows:

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that every child that requires a school place has access to one; this is referred to as the sufficiency duty. In ensuring that almost nine out of ten pupils have secured their first choice of school, and recognising that there are more seeking a place this year than at any time in the past, the County Council is extremely pleased to have achieved this outcome. Nevertheless, the 327 children who have yet to secure a secondary school place are important, and assurance is given to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the department will be providing support to these families to ensure that a suitable school place can be secured at the earliest opportunity.

It should be noted that the national Admissions Code requires that children having defined special educational needs are dealt with separately to the secondary transfer process and in accordance with the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice. Hence,

further assurance can be provided that no child having an Education Health and Care Plan is included amongst the 327 yet to secure a school place through the secondary transfer process.

47. 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).

48. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

49. 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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

51. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

52. Review of the Implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-22.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update of how the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-22 had been implemented since its launch and the impact it had achieved thus far. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) Currently, there were 694 children in care in Leicestershire and 194 care leavers. In response to the number of care leavers who were employed, in education or in training, it was noted that this figure was improving, in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic. Work had taken place with district and borough councils around apprenticeships and more online training had been made available for young people. The number of care leavers living in unsuitable accommodation remained low. The department was in regular contact with its care leavers to ensure that they were receiving the best possible outcomes.
- ii) It was reported that a meeting had recently taken place with the Comms team to finalise launching the children's version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. This was in the form of a short video and it was the intention that this would be launched in the near future. This would help to show young people how they would be informed when coming into care.

- iii) It was noted that every local authority had a statutory duty to have a Corporate Parenting Strategy in place and these would usually cover a three year period. The latest version, launched in 2019, had replaced the previous strategy and had been updated to reflect the current challenges faced by young people in care. The format agreed for the current strategy had been based on the principles of being ambitious and doing everything possible for children in care and care leavers.
- iv) A member highlighted the issue that some children in care and care leavers were not meeting the threshold for CAMHS or mental health services. In response, the Director stated that it was essential to provide preventative services for children in the early stage of emotional wellbeing as well as CAMHS reviewing services to those with more acute mental health needs, and this was welcomed. The service was now dealing with and supporting young people with more complex mental health issues and was mindful that emotional wellbeing had been impacted by Covid-19. Some of this was already being seen but other services were being prepared to deal with increased pressures and demands.
- v) The Committee acknowledged the importance of recognising the role of elected members as corporate parents and it was suggested that this should be included in the induction package for new elected members after the County Council elections in May. It was felt that it would be particularly helpful to distinguish between the responsibilities held by the County Council as a whole, the Lead Member for Children and Families, Member Champions and other elected members. This would ensure that everyone was aware of their individual roles and could properly hold each other to account. The Director of Children and Family Services stressed that this was built into the training programme for new elected members but this would be expanded to include the suggestions made.
- vi) The change of branding for the Youth Justice team was welcomed by the Committee and it was stated that this was as a result of local authorities aiming to promote young people as children first.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

53. Children's Innovation Partnership.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the progress of the Children's Innovation Partnership. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee was informed that four properties had initially been identified and although this had now been reduced to three, the ambition was to ultimately have four. This property was for under 16 year olds and the identified property had a covenant which the local authority had been unable to resolve in a suitable time or at a suitable cost. Work was currently underway to identify an alternative property. The other properties included one in Hinckley for over 16s, a Family Assessment Centre (this was a residential building already owned by the County Council which would be converted into

three flats) and a new build in Coalville which would comprise two buildings, one being an assessment residential centre and one to incorporate the ART Team. In terms of timescale, it was the intention to have the buildings for under 16s and over 16s ready for occupation by the end of this year. The two other builds would take approximately 18 months.

With regard to financial savings, cumulatively this was expected to be between £800,000 - £1m each year. This was calculated on both residential costs (which were in house) and on staff savings (by not having to travel out of the county to visit children). The pay back period for each building was different; for the first two it was expected to be three years and the other two were between two and five years.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A member raised a query around how it was decided that a potential property was suitable and whether there was a check list to go through, such as whether there was enough parking on site, enough separation between the building and neighbouring properties, if the internal layout was suitable and whether the bedrooms were big enough and consistent in size. In response, the Director of Children and Family Services stated that a team of experts made the decisions, including officers from Barnardo's, operational staff from the County Council and Property Services. When a property was being considered, the County Council was open to hearing any concerns of local residents and ensured that public consultation took place. For parking, for example at Highfield, it had been agreed to build into the plan how the car parking spaces would be used and how they would be managed.
- ii) With regard to the suitability of an internal layout of a building, it was reported that architects helped to develop this by using a scope of what would be required in individual rooms. A scope would also be provided for any communal areas and architects would ensure that there was sufficient space for everything required. This would also include space to train parents, for example helping them to cook a meal. Assurance was given that care had been taken with the specification for each individual building. Another issue was how the homes would be decorated; it was known what furniture was needed but there could be other factors such as choosing appropriate games if it was a younger person's home, pictures and garden equipment. Contact had been made with the Corporate Parenting team and young people who had an interest in design would be identified to work as part of a team to inform the decoration of the buildings.
- iii) It was acknowledged that the County Council had previously owned a number of large homes that had been used as residential children's homes. Consideration had been given over the past two years to how to develop residential care for young people and the ambition had been to have smaller properties which provided a family environment.
- iv) In response to a query around the advanced life skills programme, it was stated that the six schools involved had been clustered together. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it had been necessary to stop the programme on a number of occasions and the decision had had to be taken to stop the project entirely and furlough the staff involved. Discussions were currently taking place with the Department for Education on how the programme could be

taken forward and further details would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Lead Member for Children and Families gave assurance that the County Council was taking an active role in consulting with local residents where it was felt a property may be developed and stated that she would be happy to meet with any elected members who had a property in their division. The Lead Member also confirmed that these would be very controlled properties and any developments would be very positive.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

54. Youth Justice - Overview.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which gave an overview of the Youth Justice team, performance against national and local indicators and details of a case study to illustrate the work that the team undertook with children. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) Four young people were currently remanded into custody and this could be at various places around the country. The County Council also placed young people in secure accommodation, but this was more for their welfare.
- ii) It was noted that the service was planning a deep dive audit of 20 children across two districts in order to consider the education history of those children and to identify any key themes or trends that could be shared. This had been due to take place in January but had been delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was hoped that the findings from the audit would now be presented to the Youth Justice Management Board in June after which any learning would be disseminated. This information would also be presented to a future meeting of the Children's Social Care Panel.
- iii) A member raised concern that there had been a spike of children who had not been known to any services who had committed serious offences and had received custodial sentences. It was known that these were primarily 17/18 year olds and although any themes had not been tracked, it was known that these young people had had no previous involvement with any services. Reassurance was also given that these young people had not been criminally exploited.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That the findings from the deep dive audit of 20 children be presented to a future meeting of the Children's Social Care Panel.

55. Quarter 3 2020/21 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a 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 October to December 2020 (Quarter 3). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) In response to a query around the charts provided with the report, it was stated that following the receipt of end of year performance data and comparative cost information, work had been carried out to compare Leicestershire's overall performance position with other local authority areas. The county comparator group included 32 two-tier and unitary authorities. The latest available performance indicator data had been used and for most metrics, this was the end of year 2019/20 data. The analysis used 247 outcome/performance indicators from nationally published sources. A range of views were available including themes, indicators and quartiles. In terms of children's social care, Leicestershire had low spending and high performance. For SEND, expenditure was higher, but performance was still good.
- ii) There had been an increase in children being electively home educated. This was being closely monitored to ensure that the service was able to manage the increase within existing resources. A member commented that elective home education could be a positive and proactive step for many families and children, although it could sometimes be seen as pejorative. The Director agreed that this could be the case, but when the data had been considered, much of the increase had been in those children who had previously struggled in school and the parents had realised that home education was working better for the child. Assurance was given that the local authority was doing what it could to support families by ensuring that there were resources within the team to monitor education and any potential safeguarding issues. Work would also take place to better understand the cohort so that support could be prioritised to the right families.
- iii) It was noted that the percentage of children having a dental check was low. This primarily related to children in care and the figure was low as a result of being unable to visit the dentist due to Covid-19. The service had worked hard to promote dental hygiene with young people and assurance was given that young people would be encouraged to attend a dental check when this was possible.
- iv) In relation to young people who were NEET, a query was raised around whether the Leicestershire figures were in line with statistical neighbour averages and whether a proportion could be attributed to Covid-19. In response, the Director reported that some training providers had been unable to remain open over the period but it was anticipated that the numbers would start to increase in the near future as providers were able to reopen. It would be necessary to consider the cohort in more detail, but assurance was given that in terms of care leavers, things were moving in the right direction. Further work would be required with those in the youth justice system as these were currently over represented in the NEET cohort.
- v) It was asked whether a graph could be produced to show any link between deprivation and revenue. Fair funding dashboards had been produced

previously and showed the comparison between core spending power to deprivation. The 2017/18 version was currently available on the County Council's website as part of a consultation/campaign that had been carried out at that time. Further information would be provided to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

56. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 1 June 2021 at 2.00pm.

1.30 – 3.02pm
09 March 2021

CHAIRMAN