



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 7 March 2023.

PRESENT

Mr. C. A. Smith CC (in the Chair)

Mr. M. Frisby CC

Mr. R. Martin

Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC

Mrs. R. Page CC

Mr. R. Hills CC

Mr. G. Welsh CC

Mr. Max Hunt CC

51. In Attendance.

Stephen Knight and Ashley Page, Newton Europe representatives (Minute 58 refers).

52. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

53. Question Time.

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

54. 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).

55. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

56. 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. R. Martin declared a registerable interest, in respect of agenda item 8, as the Chair of the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum and involved in the work with Newton Europe. He undertook to leave the room during discussion of that item.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

58. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

59. Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme. It set out the activity undertaken since commencement in August 2022, achievements, progress made and an overview of the current High Needs Block financial position. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Stephen Knight and Ashley Page from Newton Europe for this item.

In response to concern regarding the cost of delivering the programme and costs associated to working with the strategic partner, Newton Europe, the Director explained that the decision to work with an external strategic partner had been made as the Council did not have the right capacity and expertise to deliver the complexity of changes required. Therefore, a strategic partner had been commissioned in order to work with them on the programme. Members were assured that Newton Europe had the knowledge to deliver complex change across systems and had experience of transforming services within local authorities. The Director went on to explain that Leicestershire had a high number of children supported in specialist provision, and that the TSIL programme would address demand and delays within the assessment process for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and decrease the deficit within the High Needs Block budget.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Department had been focussed on delivering changes to the High Needs Block since 2017. However, diagnostic work carried out by the programme partner Newton Europe identified that it had not gone far enough in making improvements for children and families. The TSIL programme would aim to transform the whole SEND system, in collaboration with partners, to make services more efficient and to ensure that children would receive the correct level of support within an appropriate environment.
- ii. The TSIL programme would aim to reduce delays experienced within the SEND system by reducing the time taken to carry out assessments and allocating an accurate level of support the first time. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had been concerned about delays within the SEND system, that the service had not always delivered sufficient placements for children, and with the high levels of complaints received. The TSIL programme would focus on addressing these concerns.
- iii. The Director explained that parents would be engaged earlier in the assessment process and would receive clear information, which would give them more confidence in the process and enable them to understand how a decision had been reached regarding the package of care for their child. This was particularly important when the decision had been made to meet a child's needs in a mainstream school. For those children, it was also important to make sure that the

additional support they would need for a placement in mainstream school to be successful was available.

- iv. Reporting on EHCP data was based on national statistics across the SEND system. There was concern regarding growth in demand which was higher in Leicestershire when compared to other authorities and members noted that there were a variety of reasons for this, including funding issues. Leicestershire was the lowest funded local authority and as a result schools across Leicestershire had less funding available to support children in mainstream education, despite their will to ensure children are supported well in mainstream schools. Changes to the demographic in Leicestershire and expectations nationally regarding what EHCPs can deliver were also driving demand.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided on the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme, including the activity undertaken since commencement in August 2022, achievements, progress made, and the overview of the current High Needs Block financial position be noted.

60. Stable Homes Built on Love.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the Government's strategy for Children's Social Care Reform – Stable Homes, Built on Love, published on 2 February 2023 for consultation. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

In response to question regarding the impact of statutory changes to children's social care, the Director explained that the Department had actively fed into recommendations and hoped to be part of national work to understand how the changes would impact children and families. The Service would continue to highlight the challenges within the social work workforce.

Concern was raised regarding the level of funding available to deliver the proposed changes to children's social care, the Director explained that it was not yet clear what funding would be available for the Council to deliver the proposed changes. Initially, funding would be given to pilot organisations. The Service was concerned about funding due to the Council's financial position, but this would need to be balanced against delivering the correct support for children and families. Members noted that much of the proposed changes would require additional funding.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Department offered a flexible route into kinship caring and provided a lifelong package of training and support to kinship carers. Within the model, when a child could not remain with their parents, wider family and friends could provide an alternative to becoming looked after. Members noted that kinship caring could pose a challenge to local authorities as they would be responsible for providing funding, even in circumstances where the placement had not been arranged by the local authority.
- ii. The Service had been part of regional work in utilising alternatively qualified staff to support looked after children. A qualified social worker had continued to

undertake the assessments and have robust oversight of the package of care, but the skills and experience of alternatively qualified staff had been useful in providing ongoing support. Positive feedback on the new model had been received from families and partners. The Service would await clarification as to whether the Government would make changes to the robustness around social work oversight and hoped to contribute to this work.

- iii. Local Authorities could bid to become one of twelve Families First for Children Pathfinders and it was anticipated that the successful authorities would be a mix of top tier, district and unitary authorities, as well as authorities with different Ofsted gradings. The pathfinders would be closely monitored by Department for Education (DfE) and the Service would work DfE to influence the development of the programme. The Department would consider whether it should apply to be a pathfinder but would need to understand the criteria and determine whether it would be an appropriate decision for the Service and its service users.
- iv. No proposals have been shared with the Department to indicate that existing legislation would be changed. It was anticipated that the proposed changes would sit alongside existing legislation.
- v. Multiagency work to support the needs of care leavers would continue to be challenging, but the Service would work closely with partners to ensure that they understood and committed to their collective responsibilities as corporate parents. All partners would be required to consider how this review would affect the provision of their services. District councils understood their corporate parenting responsibilities, especially regarding housing and worked well with the service to deliver for care leavers.
- vi. The proposed reforms set out a wider range of support for children with mental health. Members were assured that the Service had a wide range of mental health support available to children, such as Emotional Health and Wellbeing support in schools, a Teen Health 11-19 service, and targeted support for children in care and care leavers and youth justice cohorts. The Department continued to work closely with colleagues in Leicestershire Partnership Trust, who provided services for those children with acute needs, and regularly reviewed interventions.
- vii. The Children's Social Care Reform strategy had set out that any inspection of children's social care would need to be right for children and suggested that assessments would need to be better for children. The Service had robust assessments in place to understand children's needs and would ensure that when it is inspected, the inspection report would be reviewed to ensure that the right work is being done for children.
- viii. Opportunities had been identified for improvements in the use of data and technology within social care. Technology was used to understand performance within social care and to share with partners regarding safeguarding and risk management. Predictive tools were available to identify vulnerable children so that early intervention could be delivered as soon as possible. However, members were assured that social work assessments would always be most the robust element of the assessment process.

- ix. The report would be shared with safeguarding partners, and it was suggested that an engagement process with district councils, regarding the consultation and strategy feedback, be considered.

The Lead Member for Children and Family Services highlighted the financial challenges being faced by the Council and encouraged the Government to prioritise the financial position which local authorities continued to face.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of the Government's strategy for Children's Social Care Reform – Stable Homes, Built on Love, published on 2 February 2023, for consultation, be noted.

61. Quarter 3 2022/23 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period to September 2022 (Quarter 3). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

The Director highlighted the high percentage of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time, an issue which was being experienced by a number of authorities nationally. The Department would work towards understand themes around the circumstances which had led to repeat periods of child protection planning.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- i. Members welcomed the increase in the percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training, which was related to work conducted by the children's social care service in collaboration with education colleagues, and through the Virtual School programme, to encourage and support children to reach their educational and career aspirations.
- ii. In relation to the increase in the number of eligible two-year-olds having taken up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE), members noted that there had been an increase in the number of parents returning to work and that this could have impacted the increase in take up.
- iii. All performance indicators had been developed locally by the Department, but members noted that 18 of them were they are closely aligned to what was required to be submitted within statutory reporting.

Members were pleased to note that there were no performance indicators with a red RAG rating despite challenging circumstances being dealt with by the Department.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period to December 2022 (quarter 3) be noted.

62. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Committee would take place on 6 June 2023 at 14:00pm.

2.00 - 3.41 pm
07 March 2023

CHAIRMAN