



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 20 January 2014.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Spence CC (in the Chair)

Mr. K. Coles CC  
Mr. J. Kaufman CC  
Ms. K. J. Knaggs CC  
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC

Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC  
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC  
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC  
Mr. G. Welsh CC

Also in attendance

Mr I. Ould CC  
Mr G. Hart CC

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Canon Mary Lawson, Mr John Perry and Mr Bernard Monaghan.

29. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2013 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

30. Question Time.

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

31. 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).

32. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

33. 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.

Ms. K. Knaggs CC, Mr D. Snartt CC, Mr L. Spence CC and Mr G. Welsh CC declared personal interests in matters relating to schools as they had family members who taught in Leicestershire.

Mr L. Spence CC and Ms K. Knaggs CC indicated that, whilst this did not amount to an interest to be declared at this meeting, they felt it relevant to report that they were employed by academies within the County.

Mr Snartt CC and Mr T. Pendleton CC declared a personal interest in agenda item 9, 'Supporting Leicestershire Families Performance Monitoring Report' as members of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Board.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

35. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

36. Performance Report for First Response Central Duty and Children's Social Care.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services, the purpose of which was to present the performance of the First Response Central Duty Team and the Children's Social Care Team over the first two quarters of the 2013/14 business year (1 April to 30 September 2013). A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- i. Reassurance was sought that the number of cases being audited were adequate and proportionate to the number of calls being received through the service. It was noted that the auditing of eight case files formed only part of the performance audits being undertaken and therefore the information detailed in the report highlighted only a small sample of those cases assessed;
- ii. The Signs of Safety toolkit had been produced with considerable input from practitioners, making use of their knowledge and expertise of dealing with difficult cases. It had been academically verified and was being increasingly used by partners. Staff had been trained to ensure they were competent and confident in using this toolkit and feedback had been very positive. Training was also available to partners through the Leicestershire Safeguarding Children Board;
- iii. Concern was raised about the difficulties experienced in obtaining GP support for Adoption Panel meetings and the delay and distress this caused to families. It was noted that the Department had sought the requisite paediatric help, but that, locally, GPs had limited time available to support the Panel on a regular basis. Action had been taken to try to commission this support from elsewhere but, at present, this had been unsuccessful. The matter would be taken to the Health and Wellbeing Board for further consideration with partners;
- iv. Leicester City Council, following a review and re-modelling of its own working arrangements, had given notice that it would no longer be able to provide the

Emergency Duty Team service for the County Council's children and young people's and adult social care services. Arrangements had therefore been made to provide the service in house. However, the number of calls being received had been higher than expected and therefore, to ensure the service was resilient for the future, growth funding of £200,000 had been proposed in the current budget;

- v. The children and young people and adult social care emergency duty teams were kept separate due to the differing nature and volume of calls received. The majority of adult social care cases related to either care packages or mental health matters. For children and young people, this focused on protection matters and the need for early help. The expertise required to manage these calls varied significantly;
- vi. Members applauded the work of the Children's Voice project and the film created by the children in care following a visit to Auschwitz – Birkenau. Members strongly supported use of the film on a wider basis and the Chairman requested that members who might have a suggestion for the constructive use of the film to notify officers;
- vii. The Strengthening Families Team worked solely with children who were subject to a child protection plan. There was overlap in this Teams approach to families and that adopted by Family Support Workers under the Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF) programme. The SLF team had recently been transferred to the Children and Young People's Service and a review of current structures would be undertaken which might see these teams working more closely in future. For now, strong links between the two teams had been established and information was being shared on an ongoing basis.

#### RESOLVED:

- (a) That the performance of the First Response Central Duty Team and the Children's Social Care Team during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30 September 2013 be noted;
- (b) That the work of the Unheard Voices project be applauded and that the short film created following a visit by the children in care to Auschwitz-Birkenau be utilised as widely as possible;
- (c) That a copy of the practice methodology into children's social care entitled 'Signs of Safety', be circulated to members for information;
- (d) That a copy of the improvement plan for the County Adoption Service be circulated to members for information;
- (e) That it be noted that issues relating to the availability of GPs to support the County Council's Adoption Panel would be considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

#### 37. Supporting Leicestershire Families Performance Monitoring Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services, the purpose of which was to present an overview of the first six months of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Service and the outcomes for families. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- i. The Supporting Leicestershire Families Service now formed part of the Children and Young People's Service which, in future, would be called Children and Family Services;
- ii. Members welcomed the work being undertaken through the programme and the outcomes achieved so far. The Committee unanimously supported the view that a whole family approach provided long term benefits both for the individuals being supported and the County Council and its partners through reduced need for other services;
- iii. As part of its amalgamation within Children and Young People's Services, a review would be undertaken to ensure the culture and practices now adopted through the SLF programme were carried forward and embedded across other parts of the Service. This would ensure that those areas working well would continue, where possible, beyond the envisaged 2 year timescale for the programme;
- iv. The data collected so far had predominantly been based on the information that central government required for the Payment By Results scheme. Seventy families had been reviewed as part of the process, but this was an early assessment, only six months into the programme;
- v. It was intended that in 2014, focus would be given to improving performance measures to ensure more outcomes and cost benefits were assessed. Both high level and specific measures would be identified. The process would also be joined together with other performance monitoring arrangements currently undertaken by the Service, in particular with Early Help.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme as at December 2013 be noted.

38. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 - 2017/18.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services and the Director of Corporate Resources on the proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2013/14 to 2016/17 as it related to the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS). A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Young People, Mr I. D. Ould CC, and the Cabinet Support Member, Mr G. Hart CC, who attended for this item.

The following points arose from discussion and questions:

Overall Context

- i. The Children and Young People's Service had already made savings of £30m since 2010 and was now required to find a further £12.7m from a budget of

£59m;

- ii. Savings proposals had been developed in consultation with service managers. Focus had been given to ensuring that Child Protection Services were not adversely affected. Also, wherever possible, frontline Child Care Services would be protected. However, this would not mean that such services would continue as at present, they would be subject to review to ensure that where possible any additional efficiency savings were realised;
- iii. Some of the savings proposals outlined were aspirational, particularly efficiency savings arising from item S2 (Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme) which were dependent upon the programme continuing successfully to reduce pressures across the Department;
- iv. The budget proposals made no provision for additional national service pressures that were likely to arise from changes to the Special Educational Needs assessment process. There were also some uncertainties; for example, an analysis of the financial implications of the change to enable children to stay within the foster care system up to the age of 21 had been undertaken, but this was an estimate and the true costs would be unclear for some time;

#### Growth

- v. Recognising the difficult financial situation the growth included in item G4 (Quality of Education) was particularly welcomed;

#### Savings

- vi. Item S2 (Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme), S17 (Safeguarding Services) and S18 (Early Help/Early Intervention) – An assurance was sought that savings arising from these proposals would not adversely impact on the quality of safeguarding services or undermine the good work that had been achieved by the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme in reducing demand for CYPS services. The Cabinet Lead Member indicated that he was relatively satisfied that current standards would be maintained, but there were some uncertainties which meant that the budget and priorities proposed would need to be monitored and reviewed throughout the year;
- vii. Item S4 (Homeless 16/17 year olds) – There would be no reduction in services arising from this saving. The savings had been achieved as a result of joint re-commissioning by the Children and Families and Adults and Communities Department of the existing Supporting People contract for care leavers;
- viii. Item S5 (Short breaks for disabled children) – This budget had been underspent in the previous two years and the saving of £300,000 was the proportion of the budget that had not been used;
- ix. Item S7 (Voluntary Sector Support) – A discussion had taken place at an early stage with Voluntary Action LeicesterShire and other voluntary groups regarding pressures on the Council's budget and the need for the Council to re-focus grant support for the voluntary sector which would realise a majority of the savings. The remainder of the savings could potentially be achieved by

voluntary sector service providers coming together, thereby reducing overheads;

#### Dedicated Schools Grant

- x. Leicestershire continued to be a low funded authority. The committee noted the work of F40 (The Campaign Group for Fairer Funding in Education) which had been seeking to engage with all political parties at a national level to address this issue;

#### Free School Meals

- xi. Concern was expressed that no announcement had been made for revenue funding for free school meals. Whilst capital provision had been made, it was not known whether schools would be able to plan for the delivery of this new requirement in time for its planned roll out in September 2014;

#### Free School Meals and impact on Pupil Premium

- xii. The Pupil Premium was currently calculated using eligibility for free school meals. As the Government's intention was to provide free school meals to all primary school children, how this would impact on the calculation of the Pupil Premium remained uncertain, as the Department for Education (DfE) had not yet addressed this issue;

#### Academies

- xiii. Concern was expressed at the delay at DfE level in arranging for schools in special measures to be converted into sponsored academies. This had an impact on the Council's budget, particularly in relation to those schools which were in a budget deficit position. The Committee requested that a letter be sent on its behalf to the DfE which supported the comments previously submitted by the Director and Cabinet Lead Member about this issue;

#### Capital Programme

- xiv. The Committee welcomed the Capital Programme, but expressed concerns in relation to the two issues, namely:
- That no announcement had been made regarding the allocation of the capital maintenance grant;
  - That the allocation for Basic Need whilst welcome, should not be seen as a means of meeting the additional school places that would be required from new developments. There were already concerns regarding the operation of section 106 (developer contributions) arrangements. The Committee noted that the Chief Executive had convened a meeting in February to discuss this issue at officer level which was welcomed. The Committee also noted that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the strategy for school place planning.

#### RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report and information now provided be noted;

- (b) That the comments made at this meeting be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration at its meeting on 29 January 2014;
- (c) That a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to the Department for Education supporting the comments previously made to it by the Director and Cabinet Lead Member for Children Services regarding delays in arranging for schools in special measures to be converted into sponsored academies;
- (d) That the comments now made by the Committee regarding the need to secure section 106 development contributions for future school places be noted and that, following the planned officer meeting arranged by the Chief Executive to discuss issues surrounding section 106 agreements, a letter be sent to all District Council's advising them of this Committee's concerns regarding the need for educational provision to be made in relation to new developments.

39. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 24 March 2014 at 2.00pm.

40. Chairman's Announcements.

Supporting Leicestershire Families Service

The Chairman reminded members that they had recently been notified that the Supporting Leicestershire Families Service would be showcasing their work in the Members Lounge from 3.00pm. Members had been invited to visit the display, meet the team and hear about some of the work that has been taking place across the County.

Canon Mary Lawson

The Chairman reported that Mrs Lawson, the Church of England co-opted member on the Committee, would be leaving her position as Church of England Director of Education at the end of the month. The Chairman felt sure that the Committee would wish to join him in thanking Mrs Lawson for her contribution to the Committee over the years and wishing her well for the future.

Ashmount School, Loughborough

The Chairman reported that an opening event for the new special school in Loughborough called Ashmount School would be held in February and that invitations to attend this would be distributed shortly.

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