



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 1 September 2020.

PRESENT

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

In Attendance.

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

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Mrs. H. Fryer CC as the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2021 be noted.

Mrs. H. Fryer CC – in the Chair

2. Election of Deputy Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mrs. M. A. Wright CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2021.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2020 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. 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 advise what is being planned for the 2020 Dyslexia Awareness Week 5th October -11th October? The theme this year is Dyslexia Creates and there is more global connection with the Australian Code REaD Charity Campaign which

launched in Australia 24th August 2020 with a powerful video explaining the frustration of dyslexia. In previous years many buildings have been lit up red to mark the awareness week in Australia as indeed County Hall was lit up green in 2018 when the last successful event for families was held to mark the week.

Mrs H Fryer CC replied as follows:

The Department is in the process of developing its plans for Dyslexia Awareness Week. So far, it is expected the Department will promote the week to schools via the Headteacher's briefing, the governor's newsletter and the SENCO newsletter. The Department will also put something in 'SEND news' in advance of the week.

5. 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).

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. 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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

10. SEND Inspection and High Needs Development Plan Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a summary of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection report of the local area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support along with an overview of the plans to continuously develop and improve services to support children and families who were experiencing SEND support through the High Needs Development transformation programme. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

The inspection report for Leicestershire had been published on 15 May 2020 and as a result of the findings, it had been determined that a Written Statement of Action was required because of two significant areas of weakness in the local area's practice:

- The absence of a clearly defined joint commissioning strategy for 0-25 SEND provision
- Systemic weaknesses in the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) including the drawing up of these plans, the inaccuracy with which the plans reflect children and young people's needs, the absence of good quality outcomes in EHCPs, the inconsistency with which plans include contributions from education and particularly health and care professionals, and the lack of any formal quality assurance framework to improve new and existing plans.

As well as highlighted areas for development, many strengths had also been identified in the report and these concurred with the views of the local area, as stated in the self evaluation document that had been shared with the inspection team prior to the visit.

A draft template of the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) had been circulated to partners and stakeholders and there had been agreement that specific sections would be developed for each of the priorities in the action plan. The document had been co-produced with the Clinical Commissioning Group, parents, carers, children and young people and other stakeholders. The views of the Committee were sought on the WSOA and any feedback was requested by 11 September so that any amendments could be included in time for sign off by the SEND and Inclusion Board on 22 September.

An update was also provided on the progress of the High Needs Block Development. Significant progress had been made and to date, many of the planned new provision had been delivered to target dates. Work continued to build on the existing good practice. There had been some delay to the building programme for the two new schools as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and temporary provisions were being delivered to ensure that all children had an appropriate school place to meet their needs at the start of the autumn term.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) It was noted that there would be a focus on improvements in the service as well as completion dates. Whilst the completion dates for the actions had been set out, the action plan did not include when outcomes or improvements would be seen as a result of the actions being implemented. However, lots of work had already taken place before the inspection and resources were in place to implement everything. It was agreed that an update would be provided to the Committee in the next six-nine months.
- ii) In response to a query around outcomes training, it was reported that all officers working in the SEN service had received the training. Staff within Leicestershire Partnership Trust who wrote EHCPs were also being trained. There were plans for those in the Educational Psychology Service to receive external training. It was noted that positive results had already been identified.
- iii) The backlog of outstanding annual reviews was questioned, along with the estimated timescale for this to be cleared. It was stated that a team of dedicated officers were in post to address the most urgent reviews. It was hoped that the backlog would be cleared by the beginning of the next calendar year, but this was largely dependent on the number of referrals received during this time. Assurance was given that the situation would be closely monitored.

- iv) A query was raised around the fact that some actions in the action plan had been rated pink and that they were yet to be started. It was stated that these actions starting were dependent upon other actions being completed. However, the Director of Children and Family Services confirmed that all actions were on track.
- v) A member raised the point that the inspection report contained no statistical information and asked what the judgement made by the Ofsted Inspectors had been based on. The Director stated that this was primarily the professional judgement of the Inspector, underpinned by the inspection framework. The report was based on how well the authority met the requirements as set out in the framework. Most of the areas highlighted in the inspection report had already been identified in the self-evaluation prior to the inspection. The Lead Member for Children and Families reiterated that there had been nothing unexpected in the inspection report and that it had been a fair assessment.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That an update be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

11. SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2020-2023.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided information around the SEND and Inclusion Strategy. This was a key partnership strategy to support the education, health and care needs of children and young people in Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

The strategy had been based on a number of consultations with parents, carers, children and young people and other stakeholders. The Committee was asked to provide any feedback on the strategy prior to it being presented to the Cabinet for approval on 18 September 2020.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A member commented that the section in the strategy 'what our families tell us' appeared to only include feedback from 2017 and it could therefore be seen that no more recent feedback had been received. Assurance was given that this would be looked into.
- ii) It was stated that the performance of the strategy could be regularly monitored via progress reports to the SEND and Inclusion Board, which met eight times a year. An annual refresh of the strategy would also take place.
- iii) It was agreed to provide an update to the Committee in a year.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That an update be provided to the Committee in a year.

12. Children and Family Wellbeing Service.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the progress of the Children and Family Wellbeing Service which had been established in 2019. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) It was noted that the savings that needed to be achieved, as stated in paragraph 4 of the report, should be £1.5m.
- ii) In response to a query about the support available to families, it was reported that keyworkers provided one-to-one intensive support to families for up to twelve months. Family Wellbeing Workers undertook more brief periods of support based on the needs of the child and family, and Youth Workers provided one-to-one support over twelve sessions to young people encountering relationship, emotional or behavioural difficulties. A key feature of the changes introduced in April 2019 was that multi-skilled teams were able to provide a broad variety of support to families.
- iii) It was questioned whether there was confidence that the service delivered good value for money. There were a number of positive outcomes arising from the service and in the longer term, the work undertaken with families prevented them from requiring work through statutory services. It was felt that the families worked with had made progress and there had been very positive feedback from families in relation to the quality of service. In terms of financial benefits, it was difficult to demonstrate this.
- iv) It was reported that the percentage of referrals to the service from schools had reduced significantly due to them being closed as a result of Coronavirus. An increase in numbers was expected in September, but this usually occurred as schools returned after the summer holiday. The Director gave assurance that plans were in place to deal with any increase in demand, and the Triage team had undertaken lots of work to streamline processes so that the service was now far better prepared.
- v) A query was raised around the work undertaken by the service in relation to young people who were the subject of anti-social behaviour orders. It was stated that this information was produced separately and the work of the Youth Justice Team would be the subject of an update report to a future meeting of the Committee.
- vi) It was noted that schools were the main referrers of families who required additional help or support. The department was confident that it was able to work with all the families who required support, including traveller families. It was, however, only possible to work with families who had given their consent, but the team was usually successful in obtaining this.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;

- b) That a report be provided to a future meeting of the Committee on the work of the Youth Justice Service.

13. Covid-19 Recovery Update.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Children and Family Services and Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on progress made within the Children and Family Services department in implementing its interim recovery in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to set out initial proposals for longer term recovery planning and strategic change in accordance with the Council's Recovery Strategy. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

It was stated that decisions had been made at the beginning of lockdown that all services within the department were critical and that the majority of functions needed to maintain a safe service delivery. During the pandemic, the department had reviewed services daily to determine how they should be delivered and to monitor staffing levels to ensure services for the most vulnerable children and families were maintained. Most services had continued to operate and deliver work with families and communities, albeit in a different format.

The Director reported that the department had learnt a number of key lessons including the use of technology to enable remote working, the ability to work virtually with families, improved engagement with young people, parents and carers and reduced costs. The success of connecting virtually with families meant that this would continue as standard practice.

The cost of Covid-19 for the department would only be fully understood later in the year or into the next financial year. Nationally, it had been recognised that it was highly likely that there would be pressure on children's services when schools returned and the impact of the pandemic on children and families was fully understood. The department would continue to monitor a number of key risk areas over the coming months.

The Lead Member for Children and Families thanked staff in the department for the hard work they had undertaken to ensure services continued and she also thanked families and service users for adapting to the different ways of working. She expressed her confidence that high risk children had been safeguarded appropriately during the period and that everyone would embrace what had been learnt.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) The impact of the pandemic on the health service and the knock-on effect on children and families would need to be identified. This had not yet been quantified but would be monitored and children would need to be assessed as required. A main area of concern had been children not being in school.
- ii) The Director reported that approximately 50% of Leicestershire schools had reopened at the end of last week and all were open as of today. Attendance was at around 98%. In terms of exams, the national guidance was that they would go ahead next year as planned. However, there was currently no information on how they would look.

- iii) In response to a query around Children and Family Wellbeing Centres reopening, it was reported that approximately 18 were still closed. However, these were currently being risk assessed to enable them to be reopened. Lots of work had been undertaken alternatively during the pandemic to enable the services to continue.
- iv) It had been possible to make direct payments to families to allow them to continue to access services more flexibly. This had been achieved within the same budget as the short breaks programme and had been welcomed.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

14. Children in Care and Permanence Report April 2019 - March 2020.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which presented the Children in Care and Permanence Annual Report for the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A member raised concern that the length of time taken to adopt a child took too long. The Director stated that the department worked hard to achieve placements in a timely way and although Leicestershire performed well, there was still room for further improvement. It was considered appropriate that an Adoption Panel was unable to place a child without the necessary work taking place and there were children with additional challenges that made it more difficult to match them to a suitable family, thus the process took longer. However, the Permanence Team had strengthened this area of work and had been successful in finding adoptive families for a number of children who had significant issues.
- ii) In response to a query, it would be possible to provide the data around those children in care who had not had up to date immunisations or vaccinations or who had not received a dental check. The issue arose when an older child came into care; close work took place with Health to ensure these children received the necessary vaccinations and any future treatment would be provided. There was an expectation that children would be registered with a dentist, but it was necessary to encourage some older children in care to visit a dentist. Assurance was given that the service did everything a reasonable parent would do.
- iii) It was stated that the audit of children with long term stability had taken place and would be presented to a future meeting of the Children in Care Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

15. Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Progress Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the progress of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership. This included the draft Annual Report 2019/20 for the Partnership and the Business Plan for 2020/21. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 15' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee was asked to submit any comments on the documents to the Safeguarding Board Business Manager.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

16. Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2019-20.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which gave a summary of the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2019/20. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 16' is filed with these minutes.

There had been a slight reduction in overall complaints. A number of themes had been identified and discussed with managers and senior practitioners to inform severe improvements. There had also been important learning from complaints considered independently and although this had resulted in additional cost pressures, a number of positive actions had been taken as a direct result of the learning.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

17. Quarter 1 2020/21 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 – June 2020 (Quarter 1). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 17' is filed with these minutes.

From the 27 measures that had been reported, nine had improved, five showed no significant change and seven had declined. From 15 measures that had a national benchmark, four were in the top quartile, five in the second, three in the third and three in the fourth quartile.

There were three areas that were rated red, and these related to repeat child protection plans, re-referrals and long term stability. Work was ongoing to improve these areas, and updates would be reported to future meetings of the Child Protection and Children in Care Panels. In relation to repeat child protection plans, there appeared to be a link to domestic abuse and families dealing with the lockdown. It was agreed that more information would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;

- b) That a further report on repeat child protection plans be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

18. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 3 November 2020 at 2.00pm.

2.00 – 3.59pm
01 September 2020

CHAIRMAN

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