

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Thursday 1 May 2014
2:00pm Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mrs J Chamberlin (Chairman)

Mr R Bearman
Mr D Collis
Mr D Crawford
Mrs M Dewsbury
Mr C Foulger
Mr T Garrod
Ms D Gihawi

Mr P Gilmour
Mr B Hannah
Mrs J Leggett
Mr J Perkins
Mr R Smith
Dr M Strong

Non-Voting Cabinet Member:

Mr M Castle
Mr J Joyce

Education and Schools
Safeguarding

Non-Voting Co-opted Advisors:

Dr B Carrington
Mrs C Smith

Special Needs Education
Secondary Education

1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr M Kiddle-Morris, Mr M Sands, Miss J Virgo, Dr K Byrne, Mrs S Vertigan, Mrs H Bates, Mr A Mash, Dr L Poliakoff, Mr A Robinson, Ms T Humber (Dr B Carrington substituting) and Ms V Aldous.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2014 were received and signed as an accurate record.
- 2.2 It was confirmed that the letter sent to Edwards Timpson MP, attached to the minutes at Appendix 2, still awaited a ministerial response.
- 2.3 It was noted that the breakdown of the number of schools in each OFSTED category had not been circulated to Members. Progress on the new reporting system relating to the Youth Justice Plan was queried.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. Items of Urgent Business

4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

5.1 There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues/Member Questions

6.1 There were no local member questions.

7. Cabinet Member Feedback

7.1 The Chairman invited Cllr Gilmour to give a briefing on the Corporate Parenting Team meeting, noting the following key points:

- Members would be invited to visit children's residential homes, and a protocol would need to be set up to arrange this together with DBS checks. A suggestion had been made that all Members should undergo a DBS check, as corporate parents.
- Young people had reported conflicting information relating to young people's allowances, and availability of bank accounts. A suggestion had been made that credit unions could be engaged in assisting with provision.
- Additional access to sample pathway plans had been requested, together with feedback from young people.
- 40 looked after children were starting apprenticeships or traineeships.
- There would be more performance updates on corporate parenting, and increased contact with the In Care Council.
- A book – Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice – was being reviewed and would be provided to all members, with training provided.

7.2 Safeguarding

7.2.1 The Cabinet Member for Safeguarding reported that a peer review had been undertaken. The review had found that the department was moving in the right direction however there was still a long way to go. A letter outlining the results of the peer review would be circulated to Members.

Phase 2 of the improvement plan was underway, which included embedding good practice and implementing a new staffing structure. A strategic review was in place. Accommodation and co-working was being addressed, in particular in the Great Yarmouth area. Cabinet would be considering a paper which proposed a co-location approach.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub had been inspected and was looking towards an external review in May.

An interim approach to looked after children entering and exiting care had been implemented, with a senior management panel reviewing cases and decisions. This was chaired by the Interim Director of Children's Services, and aimed to ensure that the correct children were in the care system, with alternative options considered where

possible.

The number of children in need without a section 17 assessment had halved since January. Further work to improve this was being undertaken.

The move to a committee model of governance could provide opportunities to engage more with looked after children.

The Looked After Children Promise had been printed into a z-card, with two versions, one for those 15 years old and under; and one for those over 16 years. It was suggested that a Promise to all children in Norfolk should be developed.

7.3 **Education and Schools**

- 7.3.1 The Cabinet Member for Education and Schools reported the figures relating to OFSTED inspection categories showed that within the secondary academy sector, 10 were 'causing concern' and 5 were 'at risk'. Of the local authority secondary schools, 6 were 'causing concern' and 10 were 'at risk'. 70% of schools were now classified as 'good' or 'outstanding'. There had been a good level of co-operation with the Diocese.
- 7.3.2 It was confirmed that the judgement of a school by the local authority was based on both the OFSTED grading and the internal grading scheme. It was suggested that a visual representation of improvement could be displayed in the Members Room.
- 7.3.3 It was suggested that the visits to residential children's homes should be extended to all Members.
- 7.3.4 The improvement in section 17 assessments related to time taken in completing the assessments. New cases would have a plan in place, and this subject would be covered later in the agenda.
- 7.3.5 It was confirmed that a high percentage of students had been offered a secondary school place at their first choice provider in the Norwich area. The expansion of provision would be mapped by demographic trends.

8. **Senior Management Arrangements**

- 8.1 The annexed report (item 8) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report set out the arrangements agreed by Cabinet on 14th April to ensure that the senior leadership arrangements in Children's Services were sustainable and aligned with improvement priorities. It was noted that Sheila Lock would remain as the Interim Director of Children's Services until March 2015.
- 8.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and support the decision made at Cabinet on 14th April 2014.

9. **Children's Services Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Report for 2013-2014**

- 9.1 The annexed report (item 9) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report provided Members with an update on Children's Services performance and finance monitoring information for the 2013/14 financial year.

9.2 During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was confirmed that all risks listed within the Register were reviewed on a regular basis, with suitable action put in place. It was expected that risks would remain at amber during the next quarter and the department was undertaking action to mitigate these risks. Other factors such as the departmental restructure needed to be completed before the use of agency staff could be reduced.
- It was too early to say whether the interim approach to looked after children entering and exiting care would have the necessary impact on the number of looked after children taken into care. Although numbers were not decreasing, the upward trend was being slowed.
- Challenging conversations were underway to ensure that colleagues in other parts of the Council (eg shared services) were engaged in the improvement agenda.
- Secondary school pupil outcome predictions were based on an ambitious target of 61%, and data from the first half of the last term indicated that 57% was being reached. Progress was rapid and moving in the right direction.
- The new Looked After Children Panel would review new admissions into care together with plans for those leaving care. An update would be presented in the next performance report. Edge of care support was available where required.
- A report on the priorities of the Safeguarding Advisory Board would be presented, with a view to completion of work on thresholds by September.
- The impact of new Free Schools on secondary school admissions could not yet be judged, however establishments such as the Sir Isaac Newton Free School offered learners an alternative form of provision. The Jane Austin Free School had co-operated with the local authority regarding admissions. Demographic information had shown that all available places would be taken in five years time.
- The support service for young people leaving care was still being set up, although structural changes within the department would have an early impact. Staff interested in working in this area had been identified. It was important that the choices and needs of the young person were balanced with their ability to live independently. The Panel would receive updates on the strategy for corporate parenting.
- The further six primary schools of some concern or of temporary concern were categorised as such due to existing issues rather than new concerns, and it was acknowledged that more were likely to come to light. Regular reporting was underway, and there was confidence that all primary schools causing concern had been captured.
- Work around Looked After Children had become more sophisticated with a better handle on numbers and quality of assessments. Money could be spent in

different areas, including earlier prevention to further reduce Looked After Children numbers in the medium to long term.

- The estimated overspend had been reduced by £182,000 to £1.337M. This was being funded by underspends elsewhere in the authority, and showed that improvement could be achieved while carefully managing the budget.

9.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

10. A report on the performance of Norfolk's Children's Centres

10.1 The annexed report (item 10) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report gave an overview of the performance and progress of Children's Centres in Norfolk from the point of transfer to the new contractual arrangements in 2012.

10.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Children's Centres were essential to the wellbeing of children, and it was suggested that the performance of partners should be considered when re-tendering the contracts. It was suggested that Local Members should be included within the decision making process.
- The same responsibilities in relation to OFSTED ratings applied to Children's Centres as to schools. The Local Authority were accountable for Children's Centres. Monitoring of out-sourced Centres included visits, and quarterly meetings with lead partners. OFSTED undertook group inspections and it was anticipated that the new grading scheme would not show any difference in rating. The Centres set up later in the scheme were expected to be graded as 'Good', with some in North Norfolk 'Outstanding'. Issues around performance and capacity to deliver would be addressed.
- Visits could be arranged to local Children's Centres if councillors wished to do so.
- The majority of Children's Centres were on Norfolk County Council sites. A building would transfer to the Academy Trust if a school became an Academy.
- The FSP referred to in page A26 related to the Foundation Stage Profile (ranking of Children's Centres). The table showed that some work was needed to drive up figures and give extra support. There was a clear correlation between FSP attainment and family contact with the Children's Centre.
- The high pension liability related to the results of tendering the contracts, where 127 Norfolk County Council staff were TUPE'd across. Voluntary sector organisations gained Admitted Body status to provide pensions.
- Core training was provided by Norfolk County Council, although some lead partners had their own training programme.

10.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and requested an update in the autumn Early

Help Offer/New Strategy for Early Years Services report.

11. Child Sexual Exploitation Strategic Development Group

- 11.1 The annexed report (item 11) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report summarised progress to date and documented continuing challenges. It was noted that the production 'Chelsea's Choice' would be brought to Norfolk, and Members would be invited to view this.
- 11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:
- In relation to 'Chelsea's Choice', there were opportunities to widen the viewings to district colleagues, and to all Members. 52 schools were involved with 12 performances scheduled per week. This was being funded by the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board. Schools were encouraged to show this to pupils in Year 9 as a minimum, and it was expected that further performances would be commissioned.
 - The Board would be ensuring that sufficient resources were in place to deal with an increased number of referrals following the performances. Duty Team coverage would also be reviewed.
 - All parents would be made aware of the performance, and an assessment would be made to ensure that it was suitable for those viewing it. An additional 8 – 10 performances had been commissioned and the production could be adapted for vulnerable children. Follow up conversations ensured an understanding of the issues raised.
 - It was acknowledged that young people in alternative education, for example home educated, should also be given the opportunity to view the performance. This could also be extended to groups such as school governors as a key part of learning and development. It was agreed that this feedback would be taken back to the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board.
- 11.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and to support awareness raising activities around Child Sexual Exploitation.

12. Update on Social Care Workforce

- 12.1 The annexed report (item 12) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report outlined progress made in ensuring best use of additional investment made by the Council in expanding frontline social work capacity in line with the areas for improvement identified in two OFSTED reports in 2013. The Interim Director reported that the Norfolk Institute of Practice Excellence scheme was successful and was being watched by other authorities. The work of the department was becoming more proactive and closer working relationships were being established with adult social services.
- 12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The contract arrangement with Skylakes meant that 90 cases would be held by that organisation as a different way of managing caseloads. The social workers dealing with these cases were accountable to Skylakes. Norfolk County Council became involved in the quality measurement phase, and this partnership was reducing management time on casework.
- A report would be presented setting out the caseloads held by social workers. The average was around 23, with the aim to bring this down to around 18. Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) had protected caseloads in terms of both number and type, for example they would not be assigned a high risk case. Some NQSWs were existing NCC employees who had undertaken the qualification, and some were new to NCC and employed on a one year contract.
- New methods of recording were being employed by Skylakes which included voice recording observations which would then be logged by a bank of admin staff, freeing up the social worker for more contact time.
- Within the Skylakes Partnership, most social workers were based in Norwich although some were just over the county borders. Cases would be assigned to Skylakes and then quality assessed. The volume of cases held by an individual depended on their specialism.
- The Skylake model, and opportunities to replicate this or collaborate with neighbouring authorities and local partners, would be explored during the restructure.
- Many new employees had commended NCC for the excellent induction programme offered. Morale was higher and the peer review had shown that colleagues felt more positive about the future, with a clear sense of direction and energy.
- It was too early to gauge the impact of these initiatives on the service, although indicators were showing improvement and complaints were being closely monitored.

12.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and welcomed progress being made towards delivering a sustainable workforce, and supported the approach being taken.

13. **Additional Learning Places**

13.1 The annexed report (item 13) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report detailed the projected number of learners, the additional number of places required, the number of funded places available and the local authority strategy to support providers to grow places that met the needs of the learners.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- It was acknowledged that this was a dynamic process and very different to planning for school places as there was a greater element of choice. Modelling

was taking place as learners moved through the education system and there was an anticipated increase in numbers coming through. The Local Authority was responsible for ensuring that sufficient places were available however there was no sanction for non-participation.

- The test would be how many 17 year olds were participating in an already saturated market. The supply was much less complete at Level 1 & 2. The funding model for additional places was complicated, with providers being paid the following year. The 11-19 Strategy Group was maintaining a watching brief to ensure that learners received a good education.
- Local providers had been engaged in conversations through the local provision networks. There was a good level of participation at age 16.
- Less than 10% of learners were in special schools or pupil referral units.

13.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and approve the direction of travel.

14. Response to the O&S Pathway Planning Group Recommendations

14.1 The annexed report (item 14) by the Interim Director of Children's Services was received. The report outlined how Children's Services intended to take forward the recommendations detailed in the report produced by the Pathway Planning Working Group.

14.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Technology was being employed to improve working arrangements for social workers, and to ensure that the young person received copies of relevant paper work in a more timely manner.
- It was suggested that updates could be included within future performance reports.

14.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to recommend the proposed action plan and to acknowledge the response provided in respect of the letter by the Chairman of the Working Group.

15. Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

15.1 The annexed report (item 15) by the Chairman was received. The report asked Members to consider an updated scrutiny forward work programme for recommendation to the relevant committee.

15.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The role of the Committee in making decisions as well as having an overview of areas of improvement would be a key area of work for the new Chairman and officers.

15.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to recommend the work programme to the new committee with

the following additions:

- A schedule of Member visits to residential homes.
- Member Working Group on Pathway Planning for Care Leavers to be reconvened to review a sample of pathway plans, to test for improved quality, and to consider further feedback from young people about the quality of pathway planning.
- The next performance report to include:
 - An update on activity being undertaken to address highest risks for child protection.
 - An update on progress towards establishing a leaving care service.
 - Feedback from Looked After Children.
 - Children's Centre performance.
- The Early Help Offer/New Strategy for Early Years Services report in the autumn to include an update on the impact of steps being taken to improve Children's Centres.

The Chairman thanked all Members and Officers for their contribution to the Panel, which was echoed by the Interim Director of Children's Services. Councillors thanked the Chairman for steering the Panel through a difficult year.

The meeting closed at 5.05pm.

CHAIRMAN



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