

Children's Services Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Tuesday 14 March 2017
10am, Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mr R Smith – Chair

Mr A Adams

Mr R Bearman

Mrs J Chamberlin

Ms E Corlett

Mr D Crawford

Mrs S Gurney – Vice-Chair

Mr B Hannah

Mr J Joyce

Mr M Kiddle-Morris

Mr J Perkins

Ms C Rumsby

Mr M Sands

Mr B Stone

Miss J Virgo

Mrs J Leggett

Non-voting Parent Governor Representative

Dr K Byrne

Non-Voting Co-opted Advisors

Mr C Spencer

Ms V Aldous

Ms C Smith

Mrs A Best-White

Norfolk Governance Network

Primary Education

Secondary Education

Schools Forum Rep

The Chairman welcomed Matt Dunkley, who was attending his first meeting as Interim Executive Director of Children's Services.

The Interim Executive Director advised the Committee that Cathy Mouser, Assistant Director Social Work was slowly recovering from a serious illness. He advised members that he would be seeking additional capacity to cover the post whilst Cathy was off sick, as it was not safe to carry the vacancy. The Committee asked the Interim Executive Director to convey its very best wishes to Cathy for a speedy recovery.

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr P Gilmour; Mr A White (Mrs J Leggett substituted); Mr A Mash and Mrs H Bates, Church Reps and Mr J Mason, Post-16 Education Rep.

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 January 2017 were agreed as an accurate record by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

Mrs J Leggett declared an other interest in item 7 (Working with SafeLives and addressing domestic abuse through partnership working) as she was a Trustee of Leeway Domestic Violence and Abuse Services.

Mr C Spencer declared an interest as he was a Director of Engage Trust.

Mrs A Best-White declared an interest as she was a Member of the Nebula Partnership.

4 Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

5 Public Question Time

5.1 The public question received and the response is attached at Appendix 1.

6 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

6.1 No Local Member questions were received.

7 Working with SafeLives addressing domestic abuse through partnership working.

7.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services setting out details of the SafeLives project which was a 5-year programme of work involving joint working in the development and piloting of improved approaches to domestic abuse and safeguarding children and families in Norfolk.

7.2 In presenting the report, the Head of Service and Partnership Early Help, Norwich advised that the first meeting of the Norfolk Penta Board would be held on 21 March 2017.

7.3 In response to questions from the Committee, the following points were noted:

7.3.1 A workshop on domestic abuse was being held at Blackfriars Hall on 14 March. Following the workshop, a link to any relevant presentation material would be circulated to the Committee by the Head of Service and Partnership, Early Help, Norwich.

7.3.2 The first meeting of the Penta Board would be discussing topics such as "in kind" payments and how the work would be carried out. Each Partner was expected to work within the allocated budget, therefore it was anticipated that the project would not overspend. Once the first meeting of the Board had been held, the Committee would receive a briefing on the key points discussed.

7.3.3 There were approximately 500 trained Domestic Abuse Champions who were available across Norfolk, carrying out work in schools, GP surgeries and other

suitable establishments. Utilisation of the trained champions had been included within the SafeLives project.

- 7.3.4 Local Members would be kept informed of any initiatives being undertaken in their constituencies as appropriate.
- 7.3.5 The first Beacon Project pilot was being held in Norwich and the Assistant Director Early Help was considering how the learning points from the pilot could be applied across all localities and also how the project could be rolled out across Norfolk, once the pilot had been evaluated.
- 7.3.6 The project had been developed in consultation with key partners and had incorporated best practice from around the country.
- 7.3.7 SafeLives would be providing a specialist consultant who could give advice in cases of suspected domestic abuse and violence. SafeLives had worked with a number of Local Authorities assisting with the development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and had the required expertise in this area.
- 7.3.8 Utilising the single front door approach would mean information could be shared in a timely manner, although caution was needed in order that the MASH was not compromised. Until the model had been fully developed and implemented, there was a need to continue with the current arrangements.
- 7.3.9 One element of the work of the Norfolk Penta Board was to explore how keen partners were to develop the Drive Perpetrator Programme which had not received any funding as yet. The Drive Perpetrator Programme could develop services to address the behaviour of perpetrators of domestic abuse which were very limited at present.
- 7.3.10 It would not be necessary to wait until the pilot had been completed before learning could be evaluated and shared across Norfolk localities.
- 7.3.11 The Head of Service and Partnership, Early Help, Norwich would investigate and let the Committee know the reasons that the one front door aspect of the project was not commencing until March 2018.
- 7.3.12 To avoid inputting data onto the system more than once, careful management was needed to ensure the technology supporting the one front door approach was suitable as it needed to be appropriate for all the partners to access and update as required.
- 7.3.13 The Assistant Director Early Help said she knew of no specific examples of where the lack of social housing had led to the need for the service and would investigate further. The Assistant Director would provide a written response to Mrs Chamberlin.
- 7.3.14 The need to ensure information was shared safely to protect confidentiality was widely recognised by everyone involved in the project, together with the fact that information sharing was paramount to safeguarding children.
- 7.3.15 As part of the mobilisation planning, some work was being carried out to ensure there was sufficient capacity in the social work and early help system to respond to any possible increase in referrals once public awareness had been raised.

- 7.3.16 The Committee thanked officers for their work on the project and wished the project every success.
- 7.4 The Committee **NOTED** the report and **ENDORSED** Children's Services involvement in the partnership and involvement in the Beacon Project.

8 Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring 2016-17.

- 8.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services setting out the performance data, information and analysis presented in the vital sign report cards. The Committee was asked to review and comment on the performance data and determine whether the recommended actions identified were appropriate or whether another course of action was required.
- 8.2 In presenting the report, the Committee noted that, following extensive data analysis on the Looked After Children cohort, no trends or issues had been identified that showed Norfolk had a fundamentally different cohort to that of other county councils across the country, though it had identified that Norfolk needed to address the identified issues quicker.
- 8.3 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
- 8.3.1 It was anticipated that the Edge of Care and Barnardo's project would go live in June 2017. As the bid for money from the Innovation Fund had been unsuccessful the progress of the project had slowed and had needed a much sharper focus. The Innovation Fund had been very over-subscribed which meant other ways of resourcing the project needed to be identified. This had led to the need to second Norfolk County Council staff to Barnardo's which had required sensitive communication.
- 8.3.2 Members were pleased to see that the number of completed Pathway Plans had increased significantly recently.
- 8.3.3 Education
- 8.3.3.1 The Committee expressed concern about the number of exclusions from schools across Norfolk and the reasons for those exclusions. The Committee was reassured that work was being undertaken to engage with schools about the reasons for pupils being excluded and that there had been a slight decline in the last half-term, which was encouraging.
- 8.3.3.2 The Committee would receive a report at a future meeting about the outcomes of a review of the current models for pupils with high needs, providing suggestions and ideas as to how funding for excluded pupils could be moved between schools.
- 8.3.3.3 A national consultation was currently being carried out on the funding settlement. The Schools Forum had responded to the consultation and Norfolk County Council had seen and agreed with their response. The Committee was reassured that Norfolk County Council would do everything it could to support governors and leaders in making difficult decisions and schools would continue to do the best they could with the available funding.

- 8.3.3.4 In response to a question as to why there had been no Councillor involvement in the meeting to explore the exclusion of Children in Care, the Head of Achievement Service explained that they had felt some work needed to be carried out initially before the project could be taken forward. The need to ensure County Councillors were kept apprised of reasons for permanent exclusions would be raised at the next Corporate Parenting Board meeting.
- 8.3.3.5 The Exclusions Task and Finish Group had considered possible patterns of exclusions including where and why exclusions had occurred. Norwich and Great Yarmouth had been identified as hotspots and there had been some recurring themes in terms of youngsters and needs. Recently there had been a change in the profile from those identified as special educational needs (SEN) to there being an increase in children who were disadvantaged and who caused disruption. Work was taking place to support and challenge schools to prevent exclusion.
- 8.3.3.6 Norfolk County Council attended exclusion reviews at most Local Authority maintained schools, although they would need to be invited to attend exclusion reviews for Academy and Free schools. The issue of high exclusions had been raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- 8.3.3.7 Data showed that the numbers of exclusions proportionally was distributed evenly between the Local Authority and Academy schools.
- 8.3.3.8 The Short Stay School for Norfolk (SSFN) had recently been commissioned to increase the number of places it had available. The Committee was reassured that all 90 pupils currently excluded were receiving either e-learning or home schooling and some work was being undertaken as to how capacity could be expanded to meet the rise in numbers. The Committee would receive a report at its meeting in May 2017.
- 8.3.3.9 The number of LAC currently excluded (currently 6 in Norfolk and 1 out of county) was unprecedented in Norfolk and was a very worrying situation. Daily or weekly contact was made with all schools attended by LAC to check that they were attending school regularly.
- 8.3.3.10 The Committee would receive a progress report on the Norwich Opportunity Area project at a future meeting. Opportunity Areas would create local partnerships with early years providers, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, charities and Local Authorities.
- 8.3.3.11 Under the current policy, pupils receiving a Grade D in English and Maths would need to re-take those exams if they wished to enter post-16 education.
- 8.3.4 Early Help
- 8.3.4.1 The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services advised that he had asked colleagues to measure the percentage of children and young people who had been subject to a child protection plan, who had previously received some form of early help intervention.
- 8.3.4.2 It was widely agreed that in order to obtain more robust information, the story as well as the data for each child and young person needed to be developed to map

outcomes. Members were reminded that the journey of a child could be tracked when the new LiquidLogic software became available.

8.3.4 Social Work

8.3.4.1 Members expressed concern about recent media reports which had shown alleged unacceptable living accommodation in some unregulated accommodation for young care leavers.

8.3.4.2 Miss E Corlett proposed, seconded by Mr J Joyce, that:-

This Committee convenes a cross-party Task and Finish Group to tackle the issue of unregulated accommodation for young care leavers, including looking at the experiences of young care leavers and LAC via the In-Care Council to make sure young people's voices were heard.

8.3.4.3 The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director Early Help advised that all the unregulated homes had been inspected following the media reports (18 placements) to ensure the cases identified in the press had not been replicated throughout all homes run by Sixteen-Plus. All 18 homes visited had been found to be in an acceptable condition, although there were four cases where complaints had been made that needed further investigation and an independent investigator would be commissioned to look at those four complaints. Members were reassured that everything was being done to ensure young people were being well-supported.

8.3.4.4 The Interim Executive Director suggested Members could consider holding a special meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel where they could receive feedback from the young people themselves, rather than convening a special Task and Finish Group which would be difficult to arrange during the period before purdah.

8.3.4.5 Members discussed whether it would appropriate to hold a Task and Finish Group this near to the election and also whether the Group would be able to complete its work before the election on 4 May 2017.

8.3.4.6 Mrs S Gurney proposed the following amendment to the motion:

This Committee convenes ~~a cross-party Task and Finish Group~~ an additional meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board before the election to tackle the issue of unregulated accommodation for young care leavers, including looking at the experiences of young care leavers and LAC via the In-Care Council to make sure young people's voices were heard.

The amendment was seconded by Mr R Smith.

8.3.4.7 Upon the amended motion being put to the vote, with 10 votes in favour and 6 votes against the amended motion was **CARRIED** and became the substantive motion.

8.3.4.8 Upon the substantive motion being put to the vote, it was **AGREED** that:

This Committee asks for an additional meeting of the Corporate Parenting Executive Group to be held before the election to tackle the issue of unregulated accommodation for young care leavers, including looking at the experiences of young care leavers and LAC via the In-Care Council to make sure young people's voices were heard.

8.3.5 Finance

The Committee noted that a forecast overspend had increased by approximately £400k. With the projected underspends in other departments, the overall Norfolk County Council budget was projecting a small underspend.

The overspend in Children's Services would not be rolled forward to the next financial year.

8.4 The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** that:

This Committee asks for an additional meeting of the Corporate Parenting Executive Group to be held before the election to tackle the issue of unregulated accommodation for young care leavers, including looking at the experiences of young care leavers and LAC via the In-Care Council to make sure young people's voices were heard.

The meeting closed at 12.15pm.

Chair



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Children's Services Committee

Tuesday 14 March 2017

5 Public Question Time

Question 1 from Mr R Fenton:

In the light of recent central government statements and our shared desire to improve, what **specific** measures are in place to measure pupils' wellbeing in Norfolk's schools?

Reply by the Chairman:

Schools, whether LA maintained, Academy or Free, have the responsibility for pupil's wellbeing. The strategic and day to day responsibility for school leadership and management rests with school Governance and school leaders. This includes understanding and meeting the well-being needs of children and young people in their schools. The local authority does not have any measures to monitor the well-being of children in schools. Schools can access support and training for the delivery of aspects of the curriculum which can support the personal, social and emotional development of children and young people through the local authority traded services and a wide range of other providers.