



Children's Services Scrutiny Sub Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 2 December 2020
at 2 pm as a virtual teams meeting

Present:

Cllr Roy Brame
Cllr Colleen Walker
Cllr Hadyn Thirtle
Cllr Eric Seward

Cllr Judy Oliver

Parent Governor Representative

Mr Giles Hankinson

Also present (who took a part in the meeting):

Rashid Almutairi	Strategic Commissioner Specialist Support
Mary Baldwin	Operational Lead, Intensive and Specialist Support Service
Carey Cake	Head of Independent Statutory Services
Ricky Cooper	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Resources
Kate Dexter	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Tim Eyres	Assistant Director Commissioning and Partnerships, Children's Services
Paul Finon	Head of Intensive and Specialist Support Services
Karen Haywood	Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager
Ian Jansens	Commissioning and Service Development Manager (Sufficiency)
Sarah Jones	Director of Commissioning, Partnerships and Resources, Children's Services
Emily Lown	Commissioning and Development Manager
Michelle Mackney	Service Manager for Residential and Semi-Independent Accommodation Services
Marcus Needham	Head of Quality Performance and Systems
Georgina Potter	Senior Systems & Reporting Manager
Jenny Sproule	FGC Team Manager
Phil Watson	Director of Children's Social Care
James Wilson	Director of Quality and Transformation, Children's Services

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Emma Corlett, substituted by Cllr Coleen Walker;

Cllr Roy Hanton, substituted by Cllr Hadyn Thirtle and Cllr Dan Roper, substituted by Cllr Eric Seward. Apologies were also received from Ms Jo O'Connor (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020 were agreed.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 4.1 Cllr Roy Brame and Mr Giles Hankinson declared an "other interest" because they were Governors of schools in the Norfolk area.

4. Urgent Business

- 4.1 No urgent business was discussed.

5. Performance in Children's Services: Edge of Care Support & Alternatives to Care

- 5.1 The annexed report (5) by the Executive Director of Children's Services was received which gave the Committee an overview of the performance in Children's Services and in turn the opportunity to scrutinise, support and challenge that performance.

- 5.2 The Director for Quality and Transformation highlighted the following points;
- Keeping families together was an essential part of work, and investment had been made into the dedicated services which intervene when families are at crisis or when situations become acute. It was the whole system together with the specialist services working alongside the social care teams that was making the impact. It was also important to recognise that there were two strands for the edge of care; those coming into care and supporting those exiting care and the planning involved for returning home. It was also important to realise that although care numbers had reduced substantially in Norfolk, there has been no change to the care threshold and for some children being in care was the right thing.
 - Practice was very much at the heart of the strategy. Relationship based practice was central to the overall philosophy and forming the right relationships to reduce the risk and reduce the number of Looked After Children.
 - In January 2019, there were 190 more children in care than to date. That number had also been reducing steadily and consistently since as a result of the strategy and intervention that had been put in place.
 - Although there was a lot to be positive about there was no complacency and it was recognised that there was further work to do.

- 5.3 In response to member's questions, the following points were noted;

- 5.3.1 Keeping families together had always been an important message, however the transformation was approximately just over 2 years in. The family group working was implemented in 2018 and this was the start. The numbers of children in care

related to the impact of the transformation as the numbers reduced significantly around summer 2019 when the main transformation had taken place.

- 5.3.2 The profile of the work taking place with unaccompanied asylum seekers had been raised nationally. Senior Officers had been asked to share the work to support other Local Governments to help them improve their practice and help those less confident to meet the unaccompanied asylum seekers needs'. Norfolk County Council had spoken at National Conferences and been asked to write articles.
- 5.3.3 It was acknowledged that there had been information given to Members on the numbers of service users for various parts of the service, but limited information given around the outcomes. Members heard that there was an outcomes framework which was currently being developed as part of the Children's Partnership titled 'Flourish Vision' and it was hoped that by the middle of 2021 there would be that framework which accurately measured the outcomes for children. The primary outcome would always be for families to stay together.
- 5.3.4 The pandemic had impacted the exit rates from care, and the reference 'drift' had been picked up from improvement journey. Challenges had been made of capacity of social work practitioners to ensure that the returning home is successful and carried out in the safest way. The delay of court hearings had meant a delay of children leaving the care system, but this was known about and was being tackled. There should now be an acceleration of children leaving care. However, the drift and delay were not as bad as first thought, and all children that could return home this year had returned home.
- 5.3.5 The most important aspect of the family network meetings were the amount of planning for the child and family and to enforce that the central and most important thing was how to keep the family safe and the lived experience of the child, which in turn kept the child voice central to the whole process. A family plan was then produced how to keep the child safe and improve their lived-in experience.
- 5.3.6 Members asked if outcomes and impact around neglect could be discussed at a future scrutiny meeting. It was important to monitor that area.
- 5.3.7 In order to measure a child's happiness, there were various ways of doing so. For Looked After Children and care leavers, the bright spot survey was used. This was a national survey series of questions and the result would indicate where the child was on a national scale in terms of happiness. In addition, there was also the strengths and difficulties questionnaire which focused on wellbeing and emotional wellbeing, which could help highlight any problems at an early stage. For non Looked After Children and care leavers, the signs of safety were used.
- 5.3.8 Members suggested hearing from children and young people and their experiences. Officers would explore the options as there were already forums for this such as Corporate Parenting Board but it might be useful in the workshop arena.
- 5.3.9 The Stronger Family Service was an intensive intervention over a 6 month period for families that were at risk of entering the care system. The outcomes were

positive in terms of preventing children entering care. 96% of children or young people who have engaged for more than 6 weeks had remained out of care. Members questioned the 4% and although it provided an intervention of a family therapy method with a good track record to hopefully try and change the trajectory, there was the exception that the right thing for the child was to enter care.

The Committee asked if they could have percentages in these circumstances instead of percentages. In this instance, 4% equalled 1 child.

- 5.3.10 Members asked if further scrutiny could be carried out around the voice of child being protected and heard amongst the many competing adults in their life, information on the impact of the child intervention and the quality of life that they are thriving and their engagement and how services were working with children of parents with drug addiction and substance abuse.
- 5.3.11 Members heard that initial proposal regarding an in house service to work with parents with drug and substance addictions had been agreed. Services would hopefully become more accessible and provide intervention at the earliest opportunity. Services such as these would report to the Committee for monitoring.
- 5.3.12 With regards to the pilot mentoring scheme, the planning had started. Safeguarding measures etc needed to be in place but it was underway and was hoped to begin in early 2021.
- 5.3.13 Members commented that 24% of those in prison were in the care sector as a child. Officers explained that social care were legally obliged to work with young people until they were 21 to help with accommodation, education and training. Any early worries of offending or exploitation were caught early, and measures were put in place to address those needs. This was an area that Officers were particularly keen to look at and they were working closely with Youth Offending Team and working in a preventative way. They could work with young people up to the age of 25 but it had to be their choice, and some chose not to.
- 5.3.14 The Chair expressed a wish to review and regularly monitor the newer initiatives such as the Intensive and Specialist Support Service and it was important to highlight these initiatives which are clearly making a difference.
- 5.3.15 Children with disabilities need to be integrated into the communities as those without disabilities. Members commented that they had seen Children's Services work in these areas and had been impressed.

6. Forward programme of work and meeting dates

- 6.1 The Chair asked if any Members had any suggestions for future meetings they could email him.
- 6.2 Future meeting dates:

Wednesday 3rd February 2021
To consider Effective Practice

Wednesday 3rd March 2021

To consider Prevention and early intervention Inclusion

Chair