



Children's Services Scrutiny Sub Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 7 October 2020
at 2 pm as a virtual teams meeting

Present:

Cllr Roy Brame (Elected Chair during the meeting)
Cllr Emma Corlett (Elected Vice-Chair during the meeting)
Cllr Ron Hanton
Cllr Dan Roper
Cllr Judy Oliver

Parent Governor Representative

Mr Giles Hankinson

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

Cllr John Fisher	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Sara Tough	Executive Director of Children's Services
Chris Snudden	Director of Learning and Inclusion, Children's Services
James Wilson	Director of Quality and Transformation, Children's Services
Sarah Jones	Director of Commissioning, Partnerships and Resources, Children's Services
Phil Watson	Director of Children's Social Care
Tim Eyres	Assistant Director Commissioning and Partnerships, Children's Services
Kate Dexter	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Ricky Cooper	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Resources
John Crowley	Assistant Director, Learning and Achievement
Marcus Needham	Head of Quality Performance and Systems
Karin Porter	Participation & Transition Strategy Manager
Katrina Hulatt	Head of Legal Services
Karen Haywood	Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager
Tim Shaw	Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Ms Helen Bates (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).

2. Election of Chair

2.1 The names of Cllr Roy Brame and Cllr Emma Corlett were moved and duly seconded.

2.2 On being put to the vote there were 3 votes in favour of Cllr Roy Brame and 2 votes in favour of Cllr Emma Corlett whereupon it was

RESOLVED

That Cllr Roy Brame be elected Chair of the Sub-Committee.

3 Election of Vice Chair

3.1 RESOLVED

That Emma Corlett be elected Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee.

4. Declarations of Interest

4.1 Cllr Roy Brame and Cllr Emma Corlett declared an “other interest” because they were Governors of schools in their areas.

5 Urgent Business

5.1 No urgent business was discussed.

6. Terms of Reference

6.1 The Sub-Committee noted the terms of reference that were set out at item 6.

6.2 It was suggested that the terms of reference did not preclude the Sub-Committee from considering issues of concern to children and young people that were not the direct responsibility of Children’s Services.

7. Performance in Children’s Services: Children in Care and the Care Market

7.1 The annexed report (7) by the Executive Director of Children’s Services was received. The Executive Director said that the purpose of the report was to give the Sub-Committee an understanding of how Children’s Services was going about putting in place a comprehensive programme of practice improvement and service re-design for children in care that delivered on major change initiatives aimed at transforming the provision of care.

7.2 In reply to questions about how the Sub-Committee could identify issues of concern officers referred Members to the data pack (sent to them separately from the agenda papers). This provided the level of performance data that was made available to the Senior Management Team. Children’s Services would ensure that all Members of the Sub-Committee had received the data pack. The report showed significant signs of improvement in the overall numbers of under 5s in care, but the Sub-Committee needed more detailed information about those areas of concern that remained. The Vice-Chair said that a distinction should be drawn in the data to show the number of under-5s in care who were subject to special guardianship orders.

7.3 The Sub-Committee agreed to ask officers to more explicitly separate out areas of concern and areas of strength in future reports.

7.4 To provide a structure to the debate, the Chair agreed that the Sub-Committee should consider separately each of the areas of service provision that were highlighted at section 4 of the report.

7.5 **Care Planning**

- At 96% Norfolk's performance in relation to the timeliness of the completion of care plans was good when compared to that of other areas of the country (this was particularly encouraging because good care planning was an indicator of the success of interrelated pathways with partner organisations).
- Because Children's Services was looking to move from good practice to best practice, monthly multi-disciplinary audit meetings were held that reviewed care plans not only in terms of their timeliness but also in terms of their quality. Steps were being taken to ensure that the views of young people became more evident in care planning. The audit meetings examined quality issues such as if care plans were prepared in collaboration with young people, if the views of young people were included, and if care plans were written in a way in which young people could properly understand what they meant.
- Care planning was driven by the work of locality teams. The work of these teams was scrutinised by an Independent Reviewing Officer who focused on ensuring that care plans complied with standards of high quality.
- In reply to questions, officers said that Children's Services was in a much stronger position today in terms of care planning than it was at the start of the year but there remained issues about consistency of performance across teams and localities that remained to be resolved. Children's Service was focusing its care planning work on ensuring that it achieved a consistently high performance and on improving matters for those young people who had recently moved into care, where more work remained to be done.
- It was noted that Norfolk had invited comments on its approach to care planning from a wide range of national and local bodies. This had resulted in Children's Services in Essex agreeing to help Norfolk to put in place improvements that led to a higher standard of performance in care planning.
- The Sub-Committee agreed to check on the implementation of improvements in care planning at a future meeting.
- The Sub-Committee also agreed to ask officers to put in place a clear set of performance indicators that enabled Councillors to better understand the direction of travel of planned service improvements.
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7.6 **Placement Stability**

- The most recent figure of 11.1% was still slightly higher than the national and regional average of 10%. While performance in achieving placement stability indicators had improved in the last four months this work needed to remain an area for future scrutiny.
- When it came to placement stability, it was very difficult to collect and filter data in a way that distinguished between the "positive" moves and what were termed the "not so positive" moves. There were no clear dividing lines between the two categories of data that applied in all cases.

- There were no area hotspots of concern in the county in terms of placement stability.
- Compared to the position at the start of the year there was more consistent practice today across the whole county in terms of planned moves of young people.
- Additional work was being done to better understand why placements broke down and to understand the steps required to prevent this from happening.
- Covid-19 had impacted on court placements, particularly for the under 2-year olds.
- The Vice-Chair suggested that Children's Services should have a more robust set of procedures to record issues of staff retention and social worker stability. It was important to have procedures in place that allowed for issues that were caused by lack of social worker stability (such as where there had been several changes in social worker and other professional staff) to be more fully addressed.
- In reply it was pointed out senior management were developing performance dashboards that took account of planned and unplanned changes in staff, supported staff training requirements and addressed staff longevity issues and recorded numbers of agency and locum staff, all with a view to achieving more consistent performance. The dashboards would be able to record where there were several changes in social worker staff.
- Steps were also being taken to ensure that young people obtained the best possible placements for their individual needs and to focus more on supporting their family networks.
- A stability index was prepared each year and the results would be reported to the Sub-Committee.
- The Chair asked for the data presented to the Sub-Committee to distinguish areas of work where officers had concerns and to filter out where there were no such concerns.

7.7 Looked After Children seen within timescales

- Children's Services had provided a consistently high performance in this area of work.
- Face to face visits were of high quality and timely, including those for out of county placements. This was recognised as such by the responses Children's Services had received during the Covid-19 pandemic from young people themselves.
- During the early stages of the Covid-19 lockdown some visits were undertaken virtually but it was now more a case of moving back to providing business as usual.

7.8 Health Assessments for Children in Care

- Improvements in performance were attributed to improvements in dialogue and communication with health colleagues.
- The Corporate Parenting Board had played a positive role in improvements in joint operational working with health colleagues.
- The quality of health assessments was monitored by both Children's Services and by the local NHS.
- Social work teams also had their own procedures for monitoring the quality

of social care assessments.

- The time that it took social workers to complete their work was being reviewed so that this did not delay the issuing of health assessments.
- The picture regarding out of county health care assessments was positive.
- Questionnaires about strengths and weaknesses were issued every year for looked after children between the ages of 4 and 16 to explore their needs particularly in terms of their emotional wellbeing. The results of the most recent survey would be reported to the Sub- Committee.
- Children's Services was working closely with all its partners on how young people could be more involved in or shadow health subgroups so that lessons were learnt from young people's experiences that helped to shape and design new services.
- The measuring of health outcomes (linked to health assessments) was as an issue that the Sub-Committee wished to see referred to the Corporate Parenting Board for comments before this was reported back to this Sub-Committee at later date.
- The Sub-Committee wanted to give further consideration at a future meeting to how young people were involved in health assessments and where they should look to find more face to face support on issues that they considered to be important.

7.9 Care Leavers in Education, Employment and Training

- The report showed that Norfolk was below the national average in terms of its performance.
- This was an important subject area and not to be viewed entirely in terms of national averages since the national standards were not set as high as they should be .
- Actual numbers of care leavers as well as percentages were required for the Sub- Committee to fully understand the issue.
- Performance was at its greatest in the east of the county.
- There were lessons from stronger performance in the east of the county that could be applied in the west.
- There were also lessons to be learnt from the Charter that Norfolk had put in place to support ex-military personnel. It was suggested something similar should be put in place to support care leavers. This was something that needed to be explored at a future meeting.
- It was noted that a care leaver from Norfolk had recently been appointed as a social worker apprentice.
- A Member led sub-group of the Corporate Parenting Board was leading on initiatives in this area including looking at opportunities for work placements within the County Council. Another useful initiative that was being explored was mentoring of care leavers by County Councillors.
- Support for care leavers was seen as a subject area to which the Sub-Committee would need to return at a later date so as to explore issues of sustainability and structural changes and what measures could be put in place to achieve the best possible outcomes for care leavers.

7.10 Fostering Placements

- The Cabinet had recently addressed issues of quality and support for

foster placements.

- Investment in the recruitment of foster carers had increased. There were more foster carers today than ever before, but many foster carers were near to retirement.
- Norfolk was ahead of the marketplace. This had led to a movement away from independent foster agencies and to better in-house Norfolk fostering services.
- There were lessons to be learnt from the success of Norfolk's in-house fostering services for other Council in-house services.
- A good market mix of fostering placements was seen to be important. The County Council was required to review the market for placements and to provide external placements where they could not be provided in Norfolk

7.11 **Children in Residential Placements**

- The graph showed an 18% reduction in the number of young people in residential homes.
- Children's Services was focused on providing more alternatives to care and on working with North Yorkshire (where residential placements had reduced to nearly zero) to provide an evidence-based model of residential placements
- A similar model to that in North Yorkshire was due to be introduced in Norfolk in February 2021.
- At the request of the Chair, a member of staff from North Yorkshire whom was appointed to work directly with Children's Services on the project would be invited to give a presentation to a meeting in early 2021.

7.12 **Children placed more than 20 miles from home**

- This national performance indicator was more broadly defined in the past.
- Because of the change in the definition some of the sub-headings for Norfolk required more detail.
- Performance needed to take more account of individual circumstances. Younger children and children with more complex needs could find it difficult to cope with long journey times in a rural county.
- Journey times needed to be placed in the context of the availability of transport infrastructure and travel times rather than just how many miles young people travelled.
- For a rural county like Norfolk travel times for those who had to cross county borders and those who did not have to do so should be treated equally.

7.13 **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People**

- Norfolk was seen to be at the forefront of Local Authorities when it came to providing support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People.
- The work to support UASC had grown significantly over the past 15 months.
- There were no solicitor companies in Norfolk that provided legal aid advice to young people about asylum issues. There were three solicitor companies in Essex that provided legal aid to which young people could look for support on asylum issues.
- The Sub-Committee's thanks were placed on record to Kate Dexter and her

team for the excellent work that they did in support of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People. The work of Kate Dexter's team needed to be commended because it had placed Norfolk at the forefront of Local Authorities in this work and helped raise national standards of support for these young people.

7.14 **Independent Reviewing Officers Service**

- The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer was to ensure detailed and informed up-to-date assessments that provided a real and genuine response to each child's welfare needs.
- The service was provided by a dedicated and highly experienced team of staff who aimed to promote the voice of the looked after child.
- The Sub-Committee asked for a report from the Independent Reviewing Officer (whom was unwell and had given apologies for today's meeting) to be presented to a future meeting.

8 **Forward programme of work and meeting dates**

8.1 The Sub-Committee agreed to the dates for future meetings that were set out on the agenda.

8.2 It was noted that officers planned to hold workshops for members before future meetings.

8.3 Future meeting dates:

Wednesday 2nd December 2020

To consider Edge of Care and Alternatives to Care

Wednesday 3rd February 2021

To consider Effective Practice

Wednesday 3rd March 2021

To consider Prevention and early intervention Inclusion

Should the meeting programme need to change then this would be subject to the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair).

Chair