



Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14 December 2020
at 2 pm as a virtual teams meeting

Present:

Cllr Steve Morpew (Chair)
Cllr Alison Thomas (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steffan Aquarone
Cllr Roy Brame
Cllr Emma Corlett
Cllr Phillip Duigan
Cllr Ron Hanton

Cllr Joe Mooney
Cllr Judy Oliver
Cllr Richard Price
Cllr Dan Roper
Cllr Haydn Thirtle

Substitute Members present:

Cllr Mike Smith-Claire for Cllr Chris Jones

Parent Governor Representative

Mr Giles Hankinson

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

Cllr John Fisher	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Tim Eyres	Assistant Director Commissioning and Partnerships
Sarah Jones	Director of Commissioning, Partnerships and Resources
Stephen Sipple	Action for Children
Julie Mobbs	Action for Children
Penny Olivo	Action for Children
Sian Larrington	Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust
Simon George	Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services
Fiona McDiarmid	Executive Director of Strategy and Governance
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 Cllr John Timewell, Dr Chris Jones (with Cllr Mike Smith-Claire as substitute), Mrs Julie O' Connor (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).

It was noted that Cllr Steffan Aquarone was unable to attend the meeting before the Committee began its deliberations of item 7 (Early Childhood and Family Service).

- 1.2 The Committee also received an apology from Sara Tough, Executive Director, Children's Services, who was unable to be present for item 7 (Early Childhood and Family Service).

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 18 November 2020 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Cllr Ron Hanton declared an "other interest" in item 8 because he was Chairman of Community Safety Great Yarmouth Ltd, a company that provided CCTV cameras in the town.

4 Urgent Business

- 4.1 No urgent business was discussed.

5. Public Question Time

- 5.1 There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues/Questions

- 6.1 There were no local member questions.

7 Early Childhood and Family Service

- 7.1 The Committee received a report and a slide presentation from the Executive Director of Children's Services, that explained the progress made to date in setting up Norfolk's new Early Childhood and Family Service and in developing wider system working to support families with children aged 0-5 years.

- 7.2 In addition to receiving a slide presentation from Tim Eyres (the Assistant Director of Children's Services Commissioning and Partnerships) the Committee heard from representatives of Action for Children (a UK children's charity committed to helping vulnerable children and young people and their families) and Sian Larrington of Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust.

- 7.3 During discussion the following key issues were raised:

- Councillors were informed that Norfolk's Early Childhood and Family Service (ECFS) was launched on 1 October 2019 with the successful transfer of 139 staff from nine providers and that, while some staff did not transfer to the new service, there were no formal redundancies.
- The new service prioritised the delivery of targeted support for families with children aged 0-5.
- Quarterly contract performance meetings were held between Action for Children and commissioners, alongside other forms of very regular contact

and communication.

- ECFS district teams, each led by a district manager, reported to a county operational head of service. The service would be happy to provide an opportunity for Councillors to visit the district teams on request (after the service had returned to normality following the end of the Covid-19 pandemic).
- The current focus was on ensuring that ECFS successfully reached those families who needed extra help the most, as part of an early childhood offer for all families, and that where families had accessed targeted support, that this was provided in a way that made a positive difference for them.
- As a result of the current Covid-19 restrictions, direct face to face contact was maintained only where it was necessary to address safeguarding or wellbeing concerns. Only essential face to face groups were being delivered in ECFS bases, however, the aim was to increase the number of families worked with and to resume use of community venues as they became available and it became safe to do so.
- Staff recognised that many families' needs had changed or escalated because of the pandemic leading to isolation and reduced access to family networks, increased anxiety, increased risk of domestic abuse and increased financial challenges.
- Councillors said the language used in the report did not fairly describe families with severe hardship issues and families in poverty which Officers said would be better explained in future reports. Officers said that ECFS staff provided access to a range of services that included counselling for parental mental health, help with housing and benefits, transport to hospital appointments, access to training and education, access to specialist speech and language services, basic skills tuition, mediation and mentoring and early childhood furnishings for new homes.
- In reply to questions, about the preventative aspects of the service it was confirmed that ECFS made use of family networking arrangements.
- The aim was to facilitate early intervention and then offer long term help, so families could stay together wherever possible.
- The Committee's attention was drawn to the many ways in which families could contact the service which included by telephone, email, the website and through social media pages.
- Councillors asked for details regarding digital exclusion levels across the county and for these to be carefully monitored. In reply, Officers pointed out that ECFS had ordered computers for families to access its services but did not have details regarding their take up available until after the meeting.
- It was pointed out that Action for Children had developed local ECFS Facebook pages which were very effective for communication by families.
- In addition, the ECFS understood the importance of making links with NHS webpages (Just One Norfolk) rather than duplicating information held elsewhere. Just One Norfolk provided a digital platform that included a portal for parents to provide peer support to other parents and seek advice and support at all hours of the day. It was pointed out that parents had co-produced digital content with staff on Just One Norfolk that talked about their experiences.
- Regular meetings involving ECFS, the Healthy Child Programme, the Library Service, Public Health and our Family Information Service had led to shared digital messages.

- ECFS and Healthy Child Programme staff had also worked together to raise awareness in their teams about the expected increase in non-accidental injuries during the pandemic.
- The six locality Early Childhood Advisory Boards provided a local forum for services and agencies focused on early childhood outcomes and members of the boards were working together to identify ways to target and support local organisations to expand their service delivery.
- Officers agreed to a request from Councillors that they should be provided with a central point of contact within the ECFS and the names of the Chairs of Local Advisory Boards who could be contacted should Councillors want to take up issues of local concern.
- The Vice-Chair questioned the figure of 17 % of families who had not achieved their desired outcomes, the percentage of this figure that was attributed to “other reasons” and what was meant by the use of the term “other reasons”. In reply, officers said that the “other reasons” category had been removed because it served no useful purpose. Some of the “other reasons” were attributed to family disengagement during the period of support, partly because needs were met before the end of the activity, or because families moved outside of Norfolk.
- Officers added that Action for Children was a consent-based service and families could not be made to engage with the service. User feedback indicated that 96% would recommend the service to other families, with 79% reporting that the service got involved at the right time. 97% found the staff to be helpful with 86% feeling they were given all the support they needed.
- Councillors said that they required a greater sense of the level of unmet need across the county to be confident that the families who required support were able to receive it.
- The Chair said that the previous service was criticised because it had not contacted more than 75 % of those families in Norfolk that needed support. To properly assess performance the Committee required a comparative percentage figure of the gap in service provision that existed at the present time.
- In reply, officers said that it was difficult to provide such comparisons because the new service had different aims and objectives to those of the previous service and these were still early days. Frontline practitioners were working together more effectively than they had in the past, developing shared pathways for families, and prioritising families in greatest need. In reply to further questions officers said that this work included a new joint referral pathway for children with speech, language and communication needs.
- An early childhood population data dashboard that focused on impact and outcomes was under development and would in time be a key tool to assist the Early Childhood Advisory Boards to assess local needs, map existing provision and identify local priorities. Training and development would be provided to improve Action for Children’s accuracy of case recording and the quality of case records. It was, however, too early for the new datasets to provide for a detailed analysis of how overall need in the county was being met.
- It was pointed out that Action for Children used an ‘Outcomes Star’ to work with families to measure progress, alongside use of a range of evidence-

based interventions.

- There had been both locally and nationally a threefold increase in the number in early years referrals when compared to this time last year.
- Councillors raised questions about what happened to families who did not meet with the requirements of the triage assessment. In reply officers said that those families who were not accepted or who dropped out at the triage stage were not lost to the system and were signposted to other appropriate services. There were links with other pathway providers and the EDSF staff attended joint meetings to provide a joined up of service.
- ECFS staff provided access to specialist projects for disabled children and those with learning and behavioural difficulties. These included residential care, short breaks and respite care services, keyworker support for families and carers, and advocacy work to help young disabled people transition into adulthood.
- It was noted that the Safeguarding Childrens Board was taking a careful look at child abuse during the lockdown. There had not been the anticipated surge in demand regarding injuries and domestic abuse and neglect (particularly for children aged 0-2 years) that was expected at the front door of the EDSF at the start of the pandemic.
- It was pointed out that at the present time in the budget cycle 74% of the money in the Families Support Fund was spent. The EDSF was making use of money in the Emergency Covid-19 Support Fund and Winter Support Fund.

7.4 **RESOLVED**

That Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Place on record thanks to the officers and guests who attended today's meeting for helpful and informative presentations.**
- 2. Ask that the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee carry out a detailed examination as part of their forward work programme of the following issues that were identified in today's meeting:**
 - 1) The best means of measuring and securing desired outcomes for children and of assessing the impact that the ECFS had on families.**
 - 2) Data on a geographical basis that showed the impact that digital exclusion levels had on children and families and about how families faced with such barriers could be reached and supported to achieve desired outcomes.**
 - 3) Data about other areas identified in the EQIA (for example data that showed if children with SEND and parents with EAL were represented in the ECFS at levels that officers would expect to find), together with more demographic data on who was and, more importantly, who was not accessing the ECFS).**
 - 4) Data that provided Councillors with a greater understanding of the impact that the ECFS had on changes in Needs analysis (for example the level of need that was currently being met, the identified gaps in service provision, how gaps were addressed and the degree of impact on need that the ECFS was expected to make).**

- 5) An analysis of the potential for a contract variation if the level of need significantly exceeds that expected when the ECFS was commissioned due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and any potential recession that might follow.
- 6) Data that placed the ECFS in the context of referrals to the wider social care system (for example the numbers of referrals to social care in the past 12 months that had prior contact with ECFS, the missed opportunities that had been identified and evidence to show if ECFS put safety in place quickly enough for those children who needed to be protected).
- 7) Data that placed the ECFS in the context of the Greater Parent Voice (for example those who had not accessed the service, how ECFS intervention was addressing risks and the impact of intervention).
- 8) Information that identified the ECFS benefits for those living in remote rural areas in terms of issues specific to those areas (for example the availability of rural transport services).

8 Report of the Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel

8.1 The annexed report (8) of the Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel was received.

8.2 The Chair asked the Committee to endorse the changes proposed by the Scrutiny Sub Panel and request that App 2A of the Council's Constitution be amended accordingly, as part of the current review.

8.3 RESOLVED

That Scrutiny Committee:

Endorse the proposed amendments to the Sub Panel's Terms of Reference, set out at Appendix A of the report.

9 Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

9.1 The Committee received report (9) that set out a draft forward work programme.

9.2 RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee agree the forward work programme as set out in the report by the Executive Director of Strategy and Governance.

The meeting concluded at 15:20

Chair