

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

9 March 2016 – At a meeting of the Committee held at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr Cloake (Chairman)

Mrs Bennett	Mrs Jones	Mr Parsons
Mr Blunden	Mrs Mullins	Mr Smith
Mrs Duncton	Mr R Oakley	
Mr High	Mr Oppler	

In attendance by invitation: Mr Evans (Cabinet Member for Children – Start of Life).

Apologies for absence were received from: - Dr Holt, Mrs Jupp, Mrs Le Rossignol, Mrs Ryan, Mr Wickremaratchi and Mr Burrett (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills).

Declaration of Interests

144. In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following personal interests were declared: -
- Mr Cloake – Item 5 (Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board) as a West Sussex Foster Carer
 - Mr Oppler – Item 5 as an Foster Carer for an Independent Agency
 - See also minute 158

Minutes

145. Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2016 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Ofsted Inspection of local authority arrangements for Adult Education and future provision of Adult Learning

146. The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education and the Interim Director of Education and Skills (copy appended to the signed minutes).
147. Jay Mercer, Interim Director of Education and Skills, introduced the report and highlighted that Ofsted had provided a view on the operational relationship between the County Council and Aspire indicating that they would expect it to be a more distinctly separate two tier relationship as opposed to the side by side partnership arrangement that had previously been in place.
148. Robyn Kohler, Chief Executive Officer of Aspire, explained that she had obviously been disappointed at the overall inadequate judgement when the quality of teaching had been rated good. However in response to the report Aspire were taking the appropriate actions to address the specific concerns raised, such as creating a more robust evidence trail by providing more verbatim style minutes,

and the County Council now have a formal minute taker at each meeting to minute fuller discussions that take place.

149. The following points were raised in discussion; Members: -

- Raised concern that the arrangements for safeguarding were not effective and queried what measures were being taken to address this. *Robyn Kohler explained that, since the inspection, the necessary revisions to procedures had taken place in relation to the recording of Disclosure and Barring Service checks for staff and an accurate log was now in place. In addition work had started on carrying out reviews of the risk assessments of the teaching venues used across the County to comply with the requirements of the report. It had been agreed with Ofsted that this review would be completed by the end of the current academic year.*
- Welcomed the mechanisms put in place to address the need to improve the outcomes of those students who were underachieving by providing additional support and teaching hours to assist with appropriate development.
- Were concerned that the report indicated the County Council were not adequately managing the contract. *Mr Mercer explained that it had been recognised this was an area requiring development prior to the Ofsted inspection so work had already been underway to make improvements, such as the introduction of a 3% management fee to provide for adequate contract management.*
- Were pleased to hear that the County Council now had an officer in attendance and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills as a trustee at the Aspire Board meetings to enable improved engagement and oversight of governance processes.
- Noted that the Leader would take the decision on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills for a procurement process to commence for future provision of the Adult Education service. However the decision to award the contract would be delegated to the Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education.
- Recognised that there were some benefits to having the adult education service operated by an external provider, such as the ability for the provider to access alternative funding streams, but felt that the option of bringing the service back in-house should be given further consideration before being discounted completely.
- Requested that the Committee's Business Planning Group were provided with an update on the progress of the procurement within 6 months.

150. Resolved that the Committee: -

- (1) Endorses the proposed decision to continue with the Skills Funding Agency funding agreement for Adult Education and conduct a procurement for a sub-contractor to deliver the services on behalf of the County Council with a new contract to commence in September 2017.
- (2) Asks the Cabinet Member to fully risk assess all implications of the procurement before going ahead.
- (3) Asks that an update on progress of the procurement be provided to the Business Planning Group within 6 months

Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

151. The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education and the Director of Family Operations (copy appended to the signed minutes).

152. Stephanie Murray of Ofsted addressed the Committee highlighting the following points from the inspection: -

- The County Council knew itself well, the senior leadership was strong and it was evident investment made in Children's Social Care services was proving effective.
- More work was needed to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, on improving quality assurance and child protection planning when children are subject to a child protection plan.
- A new inspection framework was being introduced that would result in shorter, more targeted inspections with a longer notice period to enable the local authority greater preparation time.

153. Avril Wilson, Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education, explained that the Ofsted report had been a fair and accurate snapshot and the service had known its strengths and where further work was required. The County Council were currently working with partners on drafting the Improvement Plan.

154. The Cabinet Member for Children – Start of Life highlighted that the County Council were well placed to improve and an Ofsted Action Group had been set up to monitor progress in addressing the issues raised in the report.

155. The following points were raised in discussion; Members: -

- Queried whether the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC) across the South East was increasing, thereby putting additional pressure on County Council services. *Sir Robin Boshier, Ofsted South East Regional Director, advised that was no official data on numbers of UASC across the South East yet, but this should be available in July. Mrs Wilson indicated that numbers did fluctuate but there were currently 64 UASC in West Sussex, the majority of which were placed in independent foster placements.*
- Requested clarification regarding who was responsible for ensuring actions from the Improvement Plan were implemented. *Mrs Wilson explained there were a number of people, and in some instances partners, with these responsibilities for example the statutory officer, the statutory Cabinet Member and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.*
- Raised concern regarding the fact that children who went missing were not consistently receiving return home interviews to ascertain why they were absconding. *Amanda Radley, Head of Children's Social Care, explained that the provider who conducted these interviews had not performed well and so the service was being re-commissioned with a tighter specification and wider reach. However it did need the child involved to co-operate for the interview to go ahead, which could sometimes be difficult to achieve.* The Committee asked that an update on progress with increasing the number of return home

interviews completed be provided to the Business Planning Group within six months.

- Raised concern about those children who were electively home educated (EHE) and the fact that they were at risk of radicalisation or of harm if safeguarding checks were not adequate. *Amanda Radley explained that should colleagues from the Education and Skills service encounter any safeguarding concerns when they carried out the annual education visit they could raise these with the Children's Social Care service for further investigation.* The Chairman highlighted to colleagues from Ofsted that the issue of the lack of powers the County Council had in relation to electively home education children had been a longstanding concern of the Committee. *Sir Robin Boshier acknowledged these concerns and indicated that he would bring them to the attention of Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills* He highlighted the importance of officers adopting a multi-agency approach when dealing with these families and checking that, if they were unable to see the child during the annual visit, they checked with other partners to ensure someone else had seen the child within the last 6 months.
- Queried why the County Council were still using emergency Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation for placing young people. *Annie MacIver, Director of Family Operations explained that those young people in B&B were often complex individuals who were difficult to place elsewhere. These young people were monitored weekly by local managers and monthly by senior managers and exit plans were in place for all the young people involved. Specialist accommodation provision was being developed to avoid the need to use B&B in the future. Stephanie Murray highlighted accommodation provision as an example of the more focussed Ofsted inspection regime being developed as this issue could be chosen as a focus for a future Ofsted inspection.*
- Praised the dedication and commitment of the staff and asked that the Committee's thanks be passed on accordingly.

156. Resolved that the Committee: -

- (1) Endorses the approach being taken to develop the Improvement Plan.
- (2) Requests that the Business Planning Group (BPG) consider and agree how appropriate monitoring of progress in implementation of the Improvement Plan should be carried out by the Committee and asks the Cabinet Member to ensure that the BPG is provided with appropriate data and support in this task.
- (3) Asks that an update on progress in increasing the number of return home interviews completed is provided to the BPG within 6 months.
- (4) Refers the ongoing improvement actions specific to Children Looked After to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Update on implementation of Modernising Children's Social Care

Agenda Item Number 2

157. The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education and the Director of Family Operations (copy appended to the signed minutes).

158. The Chairman declared a personal interest as the spouse of someone on an unpaid social work placement with the Council

159. Annie MacIver and Amanda Radley introduced the report and highlighted the following: -

- Staff had been involved and consulted from the beginning in relation to the redesign of the service.
- The changes had worked well in some parts of the service but less well in others and work was on-going to make necessary adjustments where the design prototype had been less successful.
- Although the Ofsted inspection took place during the early part of the redesign some positive impacts of the changes could already be seen by the Inspectors.
- The redesign coincided with an 11% rise in demand for services and a 62% rise in the cases requiring court proceedings
- Caseloads were still higher than was desirable in some areas and the service still encountered difficulty in recruiting experienced Social Workers.

160. Wendy Hill, Principal Social Worker, whose role included representing the views of front line staff, told the Committee: -

- Staff had welcomed the redesign and felt further improvements were still required in some areas
- Every member of staff who had left within the previous 6 months had received an exit interview, feedback from these indicated that staff liked the Signs of Safety approach, appreciated the training available and valued support received from their manager but highlighted concerns over high caseloads and wanting a better work/life balance.
- 35 Social Workers had been promoted to front line management roles as part of the redesign meaning a subsequent loss of 35 experienced social workers who needed replacing. It was also recognised that these new managers required training to ensure they developed the correct skills to be supportive managers.

161. The following points were raised in discussion; Members: -

- Raised concern that Social Workers were required to undertake Court work who felt nervous or too inexperienced to do it. *Annie MacIver advised that as part of the redesign there had been a commitment to ensure continuity for the child so the social worker who was involved with them for the initial care order would retain the case right through to court proceedings. This meant staff unused to court work were, with the help of managers, now required to develop the necessary skills to prepare for and manage a court case. In addition there was increasing pressure from the Court for cases to be completed within 26 weeks as meeting these deadlines raised the performance rating of the Court thereby creating additional demands on social workers. Wendy Hill explained that if a member of staff really felt they were not suited to a particular line of work options could be explored for*

moving them to a role in another team to try and avoid the unnecessary loss of any social worker from the authority.

- Raised concern about the continuing difficulties in recruiting to social work posts and queried whether social workers were still receiving dedicated administrative support. *Annie MacIver explained that a shortage of qualified social workers was a national issue making recruitment difficult. The social work academy model was proving successful in providing the authority with newly qualified workers but it was difficult to recruit staff with experience, particularly due to proximity to Surrey and London where wage rates were higher. The option of improving access to key worker housing for social workers was being explored to act as an incentive to come and work for the County Council. Embedded administrative support for social workers was already in place and the service were considering the option of converting a social worker post to a number of administrative posts to increase this level of support.*
- Were concerned about the sustainability of the service, which was subject to growing demands and pressures whilst also being required to make savings over the coming year. The Committee welcomed the proposal that a further report be provided later in the year to update Members on how these pressures were being managed.

162. Resolved that the Committee:-

- (1) Supports the next phase of improvements required for the Children's Social Care Service
- (2) Requests that a further report be provided to the Business Planning Group later in the year detailing the progress made by the service with meeting the savings targets.
- (3) Refers to the Health and Wellbeing Board the urgent need for progress against the Workforce priority with specific reference to the Children's Services workforce.

Review of the implementation of the Early Help Action Plan

163. The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education and the Director of Family Operations.

164. Hayley Connor, Strategic Commissioning Manager, introduced the report and provided a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes) that set out the progress made in delivering the Early Help Action Plan.

165. Rosie Dracott, Keyworker, along with a user of the Early Help Service who had agreed to attend the meeting as a witness to provide evidence of her experience of the service addressed the Committee explaining the following:-

- Rosie had worked with the witness and her family for over a year and had provided support by being there as another person for the family to talk to about their issues and concerns.
- The witness had developed much more confidence over her time working with Rosie so much so that she had recently taken on a volunteer role working with Homestart.

Agenda Item Number 2

- After working with Rosie the children of the family were now much happier and this had resulted in them being more settled at school/college.

166. The following points were raised in discussion; Members:-

- Welcomed the assistance and support that families were gaining from accessing the Early Help service and the benefits they obtained from having a neutral person, removed from the family, involved who could offer them objective advice and help.
- Queried what support the families received once the keyworker had signed off the family as no longer requiring regular intervention. *Hayley Connor advised that there was a long lead in time before the keyworker signed the family off but that they did always have the keyworkers contact details so could get in touch if they wanted to. The service would also be aware if the family were referred to for help again and so could quickly put necessary support in place for them again.*
- Welcomed the news that the next phase of the programme would be focussing on children excluded from primary school, targeting improved readiness for school and employment and those who were vulnerable to becoming repeatedly pregnant.
- Were pleased that a range of partners contributed to the programme, whether through direct financial or in kind contributions.
- Suggested that the work of the Early Help Service would be a suitable topic for a Member Day as it would be good for Members to see the positive work being done and hear from users of the service.

167. Resolved that the Committee:-

- (1) Supports the progress to date in the realisation and implementation of the Early Help Action Plan and the further proposals towards the development of a Comprehensive Early Help Offer
- (2) Requests that the service liaise with Democratic Services about drafting a proposal to put to the Member Development Group for a Member Day on Early Help

Report from the Business Planning Group

168. The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Business Planning Group (copy appended to the signed minutes).

169. The Committee noted that Mr High had been present at the meeting of the Business Planning Group on 10th February 2016 and that his name had been left off the list of attendees in error.

170. Resolved - That the Committee supports the proposed approach to the agenda items for forthcoming meetings and updates to the work programme.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions

171. The Committee considered a tabled paper which was a new version of the Forward Plan, April – July 2016 (copy appended to the signed minutes). This

version of the Forward Plan was not included in the Committee papers as it had been published following the statutory despatch of the agenda.

172. Resolved – That the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

173. Mr Parsons highlighted the issue of pressure faced by 11year olds in relation to exams. *Mrs Shipley, Senior Advisor Democratic Services, advised that this would be more appropriately considered by the Education and Skills Forum and so would be referred to the Forum accordingly.*

174. Mrs Mullins highlighted concern regarding children who were not receiving early years or nursery education and therefore were not adequately prepared for starting school. *Mrs Shipley reminded the Committee of the pilot programme being undertaken in Portsmouth in relation to increasing the number of pre-school education hours and the subsequent impact on readiness for school and that the BPG were to receive a report on the outcome of this project later in the year*

Date of next meeting

175. The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 18 April 2016 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 3.10pm.

Chairman