

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2016 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.42 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons (Chairman), Shahid Younis (Vice-Chairman), Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Ken Miall, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle and Prue Bray (substituting Lindsay Ferris)

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Malcolm Richards

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic Services Officer
Felicity Budgen, Interim Head of Social Care and Intervention
Brian Grady, Head of Strategic Commissioning
Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services
Sian Mahadevan, HR Business Partner
Neil Carr, Principal Democratic Services Officer (as an observer)

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence submitted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 December 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman, Pauline Helliard-Symons asked that the Committee be informed the name of the recently appointed MASH Programme Manager.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

6. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out on Agenda pages 11-20. The Chairman went through the report page by page and invited the Members to raise any concerns. During the analysis of the report the following points were raised:

- Brian Grady, Head of Strategic Commissioning explained that the Early Help Service was offered if needed and when this was not successful the family would be re-referred to Social Care for further work. Brian stated that this was an old indicator which was set before the Early Help Service was in place. Brian noted that this affected a small number of children, however it was important to identify any issues early;

- The improvement in the % Care Proceedings completed timely was a result of Officers ensuring assessments were ready before the cases went to Court. Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services explained that previously this was not in the scope of Social Workers and this was the reason for delays in the past. Judith informed that this referred to a small number of cases;
- Judith explained that living close to home, in the area where the child was from was generally considered better for LAC, but sometimes living close to home presented a risk for the child and therefore this indicator could portray an inaccurate picture;
- Officers affirmed that there were a number of strategies in place to narrow the gap in educational attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils. Judith stated that she had recently received a letter from the government saying that two schools within Wokingham Borough had managed to narrow the gap more than the comparative neighbours;
- Brian reported that School Improvement Officers worked closely with schools identifying what improvement was needed for each cohort of pupils;
- Judith stated that headteachers and governors were accountable for monitoring the improvement in their schools;
- Councillor Bowring questioned how the targets challenged further improvement for the non-disadvantaged children. Judith felt that having one equal target for all children would widen the educational gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children;
- Councillor Younis felt that given that Wokingham was in an affluent area, perhaps the target relating to narrowing the gap could be more aspirational. After a debate on this issue it was agreed that the Committee would like to receive more information to understand what criteria was used to set the targets;
- Judith stated that the statistics around narrowing the gap were affected by the number of disadvantaged children in the schools;
- Judith informed that Schools Forum had decided to reduce the funding for the Education Welfare Officers (EWO), this was now at the statutory limit level and diminishing this service would have a negative impact in narrowing the gap;
- Judith explained that she had contacted headteachers asking them to share examples of good practice but had had limited responses;
- Judith pointed out that there was an issue relating to schools relying on Pupil Premium funding a part of their budget and therefore being less motivated in their efforts to narrow the gap;
- The Virtual School for LAC was proving successful and enabled more scrutiny as to how the money for LAC was being used;
- Members questioned how the LAC's mental health compared against other children. Brian stated that the data on mental health showed that there weren't significant differences between the two cohorts; however, other issues had been identified. It had been found out that there was a large number of youngsters that identified themselves as carers for their parents' physical and emotional needs, more than the services had realised. Members asked to be informed of the data around these issues.

The Chairman explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (O&SMC) had requested the information contained in this report and therefore she would like to recommend its submission to the next meeting of the O&SMC.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the criteria used for setting the target around narrowing the educational gap between disadvantaged and other pupils be explained to the Committee;

- 2) the data and unique features around children's mental health be circulated to the Committee;
- 3) the report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

7. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE AND MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

The Committee received the Children's Services Performance and Management Information report as set out on Agenda pages 21-24. Brian Grady explained that this report set out the wider context and conversational insight gained from working with Ofsted. Brian clarified that this report was linked to the previous report.

The Chairman went through the Annex A: Mapping of Ofsted Findings to KPIs set out on agenda pages 25-33 and invited Members to comment on it.

Members questioned the comment from Ofsted relating to joint commissioning of Children's Services being underdeveloped. Ofsted had found that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were not sufficient to support all the needs of LAC and care leavers with direct support or intervention. Judith stated that she had already raised this issue with the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and three or four recommendations had been put forward to address this issue. Judith expected that going forward the CCG would be held into account more than previously as a result of the recommendations.

Members considered a point raised by Ofsted on the fact that in a small minority of cases, delays in holding strategy discussions and instigating child protection procedures resulted in children remaining in situations of unassessed risk. Officers confirmed that this had already been identified through self-assessment and a new local indicator had been designed to ensure that strategy discussions were timely, and risks to children resulting from delays were minimised.

Felicity Budgen, Interim Head of Social Care and Intervention stated that there had been a positive move towards a more stable Social Workers' workforce. The regulator had recommended that the service continue with its strategy of recruitment and retention of Social Workers. This would be discussed in more detail as a separate item further on in the Agenda.

In response to a question, Felicity clarified that when children went missing there were two *'types of missing'*:

- 1) When it is an authorized absence – the child is late returning home but her carer knows where he/she is;
- 2) When it is not known where the child is.

Felicity stated that in the event of a LAC child going missing the Police, Social Workers, relatives, friends and the school would be contacted to try and find out where the child was.

Brian Grady explained that this report was intended as a benchmarking exercise and as a tool to map performance.

Officers emphasized that the Ofsted findings were in line with the service's own self-assessment.

RESOLVED That the Committee supports the refreshed approach to performance management informed by Ofsted inspections and the proposed performance indicators for

2016/17 and requests that this report is sent in full to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

8. OFSTED FINDINGS

The Committee considered the Ofsted findings report, relating to an inspection which took place in Wokingham Borough Council's Children's Services in November 2015. The Ofsted report was set out in Agenda pages 37-77. The Chairman went through the report page by page inviting Members to make comments where appropriate. During the analysis of the report the following points were made:

- Judith Ramsden stated that the Ofsted report validated the service's own self-assessment and peer review. The service had elements of 'good' and the regulator had said that if the improvement plans were implemented the service would achieve a 'good' rating in the future. Judith would soon be submitting an improvement plan to the government; therefore it was important to engage HWB in the plans;
- Felicity reported that Ofsted had praised the efforts made so far to recruit more Foster Carers and suggested that this should continue. Felicity stated that the Homes for Good project had attracted some people and three assessments had resulted from it, it was important to target the right people;
- Judith emphasised that it was important to engage parents in helping to safeguard children against the child sexual exploitation risks in the form of social media and the internet. Children spent a considerable amount of time at home in their own bedrooms with access to the internet without supervision. Judith stated that it was necessary to raise awareness in the community around this issue;
- Special guardianship orders were carefully considered by a panel that met monthly. Felicity stated that the number of special guardianship orders could vary due to a number of reasons. Sometimes relatives wanted to look after a child but underestimated the level of work and commitment involved, other times the child did not want to lose the support received by the Local Authority;
- Members noted the point raised by Ofsted regarding young people not understanding the reasons for contact arrangements between LAC and their families. Also the fact that questionnaires were completed but not consistently used to maximise planning for LAC. This was recognised by Officers and would be addressed;
- In response to a question, Judith stated that the virtual Headteacher was Jay Blundell;
- Councillor Bray congratulated officers on the good achievements of the Adoption Services;
- Officers accepted the point raised by Ofsted that performance management systems should be improved to facilitate better understanding by middle management of service strengths and weaknesses. The data available to managers was not in a user friendly format. As a result managers were not able to fully scrutinise the data to ensure that quality was maintained and improved. This was an area that needed improvement;
- Judith reported that work was being undertaken to improve the safeguarding of unborn children. Judith had raised the issue with the Royal Berkshire Hospital and the service would be monitoring pregnant women from families already known to the service;
- Members asked about the Ofsted inspectors credentials. Officers explained that most inspectors were accredited and experienced; there were different pathways to becoming an inspector. The team that had inspected Wokingham was considered by all Officers to be good and fair.

The Chairman commented that the targets presented in the report were ambitious. Brian Grady stated that it was important to move forward in the areas that needed improvement and not to get into a state of complacency post inspection.

Judith confirmed that the impact of the plans would be monitored in three, six and nine months' time.

It was noted that on page 83 where it said '*initial awareness to be **deleted***' it should read '*initial awareness to be **completed***'.

RESOLVED That the Committee notes the report and requests to have a monitoring report and action plan for the next meeting with a comment on each action taken in a timely fashion.

9. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee agreed to change the date of the next meeting to 28 June 2016. In addition to the standing items, the following items were added to the Agenda:

- Monitoring report on the Ofsted Action Plan;
- School improvement – targets for narrowing the gap;
- MASH update

It was agreed that Officers would allocate the suggested items to future meetings.

The following meeting dates were agreed for the next municipal year:

- 28 June 2016
- 13 September 2016
- 15 November 2016
- 21 March 2017

10. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES

The Committee considered the analysis of staffing figures for social care an inclusion report which was set out in Agenda pages 93-101. Sian Mahadevan, HR Business Partner introduced the report and informed that the staff analysis was carried out quarterly.

The report provided a positive and improved picture, reflecting all the work that had been put in to the recruitment and retention strategy. Felicity stated that Social Workers now wanted come and work for Wokingham Borough Council as there was a strong training and development scheme, competitive pay and career progression. During the discussion the following points were made:

- Ten Social Workers had been recruited, five of them were from Australia, of which one had voluntarily left;
- In response to a question Felicity stated that often Social Workers left Wokingham to accompany partners who found jobs elsewhere. Others were seeking to gain more experience, Felicity was working on making sure alternative work arrangements could be offered in such cases in order to retain the worker;
- There was now more transparency in sickness leave reporting, sickness leave taken by leavers was now included in the figures. Sickness levels were not a concern and were closely monitored by managers;
- Judith stated that it would be very difficult to compare Social Workers levels today with those of 10 years ago. The financial profile had changed considerably, Judith felt it was more important to identify what was needed for the future;
- In order to retain the workforce it was important to keep caseloads manageable for Social Workers;
- Felicity reported that in her experience 'return to Social Work' programmes had limited rates of success;

- In response to a question Judith explained that should the need arise for a sudden increase in Social Workers, a supplementary estimate would be taken to Executive. Cross boarder issues were dealt with through joint working;
- Felicity emphasized the need to keep reviewing the strategy as this was a very competitive market.

The Chairman thanked all the Officers for their work in improving the Recruitment and Retention Strategy.