

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 25 June 2015, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am

Minutes

Present:

Ms L R Duffy (Chairman), Mrs F M Oborski (Vice Chairman), Mr P Denham and Mr I Hopwood

Also attended:

Diana Fulbrook, Independent Chairman of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board
Morag Edmondson, Healthwatch
Joy Squires, Worcester City Council

Gail Quinton, Keith Francis (Interim Head of Provider Services and Transformation), Hannah Needham (Head of Service (Early Help)), Jessica Glenn, Suzanne O'Leary (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) and Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 May 2015 (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

198 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Bob Banks, June Griffiths, Bryan Albutt and John Campion (Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families).

199 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

200 Public Participation

None.

201 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 May 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

202 Worcestershire Safeguarding

The Director of Children's Services had been invited to the meeting to discuss the recent Children's Safeguarding Peer Review.

Peer Review

By way of introduction, she reminded Members that this was the Authority's second peer review, the previous one having been held in 2011. Peer reviews were part of ongoing sector-led improvement with the public sector looking to help itself to drive improvement and not waiting for outside regulation, eg Ofsted, to report.

Members were aware that in recent years Children's Services had gone through a substantial programme of change. The Peer Review had provided a validation of the service's own view of where things were going well and other areas where there was still further work to do. The Peer Review had been facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the team had comprised experienced people from across the country and included members with a focus on health and education as well as social care, allowing a whole system approach to assess how well partners were working together.

LGA safeguarding reviews focused on 5 key themes and, in addition, the County Council had identified key areas for the reviewers to focus on, as outlined in the agenda papers. The team had spent one week in Worcestershire and in that time had met more than 200 people. Discussions were held in confidence to allow the team to hear what needed to be said in order for the Authority to improve.

The review had concluded that the Council was clear in its commitment to improve and acknowledged that it still faced significant challenges. Although areas of good practice were identified, other areas were not yet where they should be. With reference to recruitment and retention, although the majority of staff were now permanent, it was still a young workforce with many newly qualified staff. However, the staff had demonstrated that they had the will and capability to make improvements. They now needed to be clear on the necessary standards and what was expected of them.

The peer team had suggested the following priorities:

- A 'back to basics' safeguarding improvement plan
- Resolving the future direction for the 'Front Door'
- Implementing a detailed financial recovery plan
- Reviewing and defining the role of Early Help

The Chairman of the Panel suggested that, as a next step, Panel Members could work in pairs - as mini task

groups - to further consider these priorities, as it was not possible to do this detailed scrutiny in formal Panel meetings.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- Concern was expressed about access to CAMHS. It was suggested that it was not acceptable for service users to have to wait 18 weeks for an appointment as this was a very long time in the life of a child.
- It was further suggested that, although the Safeguarding Board had an education sub-group, schools still felt that they were often out of the loop in relation to safeguarding issues.
- With reference to child sexual exploitation in the County, the training of school staff and foster carers was felt to be very important. Although there was no evidence that CSE was taking place on a large scale in the County, there was also no clear evidence that it was not happening. There was a clear need for more training of teachers to spot the warning signs.
- The idea of splitting into sub-groups to examine the priorities in detail was welcomed. If Panel Members' availability was limited, it was suggested that Members of the Corporate Parenting Board could be co-opted to join the sub-groups.
- It was acknowledged that there were many positives in the review findings and much to be pleased about. The structure of the service was now right and there was time to embed good practice.
- Concern was expressed about ongoing under-capacity in the service. Although progress had been made, social care caseloads were still high and there were still approximately 30 vacancies. Agency social workers were currently filling these gaps and it was suggested that this would cost more than employing staff in-house. If each of these 30 agency staff had a caseload of 25 children, that would mean that 750 children in the county were allocated temporary social workers. It was suggested that this must have an impact on the children. It was acknowledged that there was an ongoing recruitment programme and a question was asked about whether this could be speeded up. It was further suggested that, although levels of pay may be a factor, retention

was also to do with feeling rewarded by the job and supported by managers. Anecdotally, it was suggested that there was still a high level of extended sick leave and retention was not as good as it could be. It was suggested that this was the crux of the whole matter, as the service could not move forward without sufficient capacity.

- In response, the Director of Children's Services reminded Members that there was a comprehensive workforce strategy which, she suggested, it would be helpful to show the Panel. She agreed that recruitment and retention was not just about pay. There was a national shortage of experienced social workers and Worcestershire was on a commutable border with Birmingham. The West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services had negotiated a regional agreement on rates of pay, to avoid a situation where one authority was able to pay more in order to recruit social workers at the expense of neighbouring authorities. She acknowledged that it was a challenge to attract more experienced social workers. Newly qualified social workers had protected workloads and this often meant that more experienced colleagues automatically had bigger caseloads.
- It was also acknowledged that there was a need for good quality, effective supervision. Social work was a hard, stressful job and workers needed to believe that they would be well supported. Another key action was to reduce the number of families needing social work support, via Early Help services. Although the Authority had significantly reduced the number of agency staff, it had also recently gone over its staffing complement by recruiting a number of agency staff to cover the restricted workloads of newly qualified staff. Members were informed that, across the country, no authority had yet solved the social care staffing issue. Although things had improved in Worcestershire the Authority was not there yet and there was still much to do.
- One Member referred to page 16 of the agenda report which stated that some social workers had reported difficulties in contacting their managers at times. It was suggested that this may simply be a matter of poor organisation. In response the Director of Children's Services suggested that it may be that technology, including phones and business support, could play a role in this. The service was also looking at the Team Manager

**203 Child Sexual
Exploitation:
Action Plan**

role to see whether any tasks could be stripped out of that role in order to free up capacity.

- Concern was expressed about the number of changes of social worker experienced by individual young people in the care system. Some looked after children also experienced many changes of foster placement and this meant there was often no stability. The most challenged children were given even more challenges to deal with. It was suggested that the authority should consider this from the young person's point of view and assess the impact of large caseloads and a high number of agency staff on looked after children. It was important to remember when considering caseloads that each case represented a child.
- A reference was made to the recently announced review by Lord Laming which would look at why so many looked after children end up in the criminal justice system. Members were told that the Corporate Parenting Board had asked to be given local figures on this and also on the comparative rate of teenage pregnancy between lac and non-lac. It was suggested that, if children were taken into care, the outcome should be better than if they remained with their birth family. In reality this was often not the case. It may be better to spend the money on intensive work with birth families to ensure a better outcome for the children.
- In response to a question about whether the peer review had revealed any surprises, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that there had been no surprises. She informed the Panel that there would be a continuing focus on edge of care work, as it was acknowledged that making a child looked after did not always solve the child's problems.

The Panel agreed that it would wish to meet in pairs (or small groups) of Members to further consider the four priorities identified by the peer review. Members would then report back to the full Panel in due course. The scrutiny team was asked to set up these meetings.

The Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) and the Director of Children's Services had been invited to the meeting to discuss WSCB's Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2015-17 Action Plan.

The Independent Chair of the WSCB introduced the item by reminding Members that, at its previous meeting, the Panel had received an update on the Board's strategic approach to CSE. A detailed action plan had now been developed and would be considered by Cabinet in July. The action plan was very detailed and had 7 key areas of action, as outlined on page 43 of the agenda report. The Board's strategic CSE group would oversee the implementation of the action plan, which should be seen as a starting point which could be adapted over time. The detailed nature of the action plan served to demonstrate the complexity of CSE. With reference to the involvement of schools, groups of head teachers would be taking responsibility for this and training of teachers had already started.

Panel Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- One Member, who was Chair of Wyre Forest Local Children's Trust, was concerned to note that there was no reference to LCTs in the action plan. She suggested that this was 'missing a trick' in that the LCTs brought together all relevant organisations locally and should be a key group in each area. She also suggested that it would be helpful to know who the head teachers are on the relevant group and which schools they were from. She suggested that, if a local head teacher was a member of the group, the LCT might want to invite him or her to a meeting to discuss the issues. Action at a local level was very important and some schools were already implementing their own programme of awareness raising.
- In response, Members were reminded that there was a District Council representative on the strategic group who had been very active. The Board's role was to coordinate work in the County. The Head teachers on the group were all members of the Board and they would feed back to their school pyramids and colleagues across the county.
- The Action Plan would be presented to the WSCB next week and, once approved, it would be sent to all local areas. The Board would welcome feedback from all LCTs, although it was noticed that the LCTs across the County were quite variable.
- Similarly, the action being taken in schools was quite variable. Some schools in the County understood the issues, but the Board needed to

be sure that all schools were following a similar training programme, in order to get a consistent approach. It was suggested that the Local Authority could issue a standardised policy and procedure for all schools to follow. In response, the Director of Children's Services suggested that the Local Authority's role was more about raising awareness and providing models of good practice for individual schools to adapt. Although the Council no longer issued standard policies to schools, it did draw their attention to good practice. It was important to recognise that schools were very different and needed to develop their own practice. It was suggested that, with something as important as CSE, the Authority could perhaps be more forceful with schools rather than simply showing them best practice. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that she was not an advocate of simply handing schools a policy. Schools needed to understand the context and define the policy for their individual school. They must have a clear understanding of the signs of vulnerability and all staff must be trained. The Local Authority could show schools what works elsewhere and recommend a certain approach but, if schools do not take this approach, they would need to demonstrate that they are doing something else that is effective. She agreed that the LCTs should see the Action Plan and should invite local schools in to talk about it.

- It was essential to have knowledgeable eyes and ears out in the community and it was suggested that taxi drivers could play an important role in this. As Vice-Chair of Worcester City Council's Licensing Committee, one Member had recently attended an LGA conference which recommended that all members of licensing committees should be trained in relation to CSE issues. Members of the taxi trade should also be trained. However, licensing officers were not qualified to deliver this training and, locally, this was covered by circulating a printed sheet to drivers. The approach taken in Scarborough was given as an example of best practice. It was a compulsory part of all taxi drivers' training to attend a 2 hour session on CSE. This had proved to be phenomenally successful and had led to the police identifying the risk of CSE as well as other criminality. No one knew the extent of CSE in Worcestershire, but the best way to find out was

204 Overview of Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Commissioning Strategy

to have lots of eyes and ears looking out for it.

- It was confirmed that, although in the version circulated to the Panel there were some gaps in the suggested timescales for some of the actions, these had now been updated. The version that would be considered by the WSCB next week would include timescales for all actions. It was confirmed that, once the Action Plan had been signed off by the Board, it would be considered by Cabinet.

The Chairman of the Panel suggested that this was a critical issue for the Panel to scrutinise. It was agreed that CSE would be considered by the Panel again in January 2016 to assess how implementation of the Action Plan was progressing.

At this point the Panel took a short break before considering the next item.

The Head of Provider Services and Transformation was invited to the meeting to provide an update on the key areas of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Commissioning Strategy.

In introducing the item, the following main points were made:

- In the last five years the number of looked after children had increased from 580 to 680. The total figure masked a high level of attrition, 272 young people had left the care system and there had been 312 new entrants.
- The Council had recognised these demand pressures and agreed additional investment. Progress had also been made after one year of the three year Looked After Children's and Care Leavers' Commissioning Strategy.
- One of the strategy's key actions was to further develop a good in house service. The County Council currently had 32 residential beds across eight children's homes and all were either good or outstanding. This was something that the Authority was very proud of. However, it did not mean that the service was standing still.
- The Authority was looking to develop a short breaks service which would be halfway between a young person being at home and being taken into care. There had in the past been a lack of options for children in this situation, resulting in them

being taken into care when this may not have been necessary.

- 70% of looked after children were in foster care, a figure which compared favourably with other authorities. However, the Authority did use a high level of external foster agencies, something that it was now trying to remedy by recruiting more in-house foster carers. This was due to both cost and care issues. It was confirmed that the campaign was exceeding its target milestones with 32 new carers either approved or in training this year.
- A question was asked about whether the new in-house foster carers were recruited from independent foster agencies (IFAs) or completely new to fostering. It was confirmed that carers for 7 children had already been brought back to the in-house service from IFAs and carers of a further 8 children were in the process of coming in-house. The Authority's offer of support to foster carers had greatly improved. This was partly in relation to finance but also supervision, training and other support. It was confirmed that the foster care recruitment campaign was going well.
- In relation to adoption, historically, the Authority had a low base of performance but was now increasing its number of adopters and the speed of adoptions. 88% of adopted children were now adopted within 18 months.
- Members were reminded that the care leavers' service was currently being outsourced as this was felt to be the best option for this service. A short list of potential providers was in discussion with the Authority on this. Cabinet had recently approved a new initiative to provide supported living accommodation for care leavers and the service was in the process of making offers on a number of suitable properties. It was hoped that this would remove the need to use external provision which was sometimes of variable quality and always high cost. It was confirmed that there were currently no care leavers in B&B accommodation. The service tried very hard to avoid B&B accommodation if at all possible.
- The strategy for looked after children and care leavers was complex and had many challenges, and was often influenced by external pressures. There were currently pressures in relation to CSE, and from tensions between Government policy and decisions made by the courts. For example, the Government has recently moved to increase

the speed of adoption, whereas the judiciary has encouraged local authorities to see adoption as very much a last resort, which has been a delaying factor in the process. Similarly, the Government had set a 26 week time limit on care proceedings at the same time as the Courts had insisted that every possible option was explored, leading to more activity being required within a tighter timescale. The Local Authority was also compelled to finance and support new 'staying put' legislation, which entitled young people in foster care to stay with their foster family until they were 21 years old. This had increased both workload and financial demands. At the same time as all these changes, the service continued to feel the demands of an increasing number of child protection referrals.

- The Authority was looking to develop a more robust edge of care offer, introducing a range of options between home and care, including rapid response, mediation, and short breaks. The need for this development was confirmed in the recent peer review. The aim was for the edge of care offer to act as a moat around the care system.
- Members were reminded that the approach of the Corporate Parenting Board was also currently being refreshed.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- It was confirmed that the edge of care strategy would be finished by July and this could be considered by scrutiny members once complete. The Director of Children's Services suggested that this would tie in with the suggested work on the 4 main priorities arising from the peer review findings.
- A question was asked about whether the Authority provided remand foster care to avoid young people having to go into secure accommodation when on remand. It was confirmed that, as part of the edge of care strategy, the provision of specialist foster care would be developed. It was agreed that remand foster care could be very successful.
- A question was asked about whether there was a good enough understanding nationally as to why there had been such a rise in the number of looked after children across the country. In response, it was suggested that, although there

was a decent level of understanding, it was not yet sufficiently developed to have an impact on reducing numbers. At the macro level reference could be made to immigration, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, social issues, the battle between Government and the courts, and the movement and mobility of children. The Panel was informed that the picture in Worcestershire mirrored the national picture.

- The representative of Healthwatch referred to work her organisation was doing on homeless young people and their access to health services. She asked whether any work was being done to track young people leaving care and follow what happens to them. It was confirmed that the care leaver population was tracked to check whether they had become NEET or were in suitable accommodation. However, this was not 100% successful as some people did not want to let the Local Authority know where they were. There was a fair amount of tracking but it was not perfect. It was suggested that there was a need for agencies to get smarter on this and work better together as, although a young person may not want to keep in touch with their social worker, they may build a relationship with other agencies.
- It was confirmed that there were currently 51 looked after children in externally procured residential placements, although figures were not available for what proportion were in-county or out-of-county. These figures would be circulated after the meeting. As a matter of course, social workers would look for provision within a 20 mile radius. The majority of children were in agency residential provision because of a specialist need, such as a particular disability or complex and challenging behaviour. It was confirmed that placements were only made at provision that had been rated good or better by Ofsted. Reference was made to provision that had recently been rated inadequate resulting in a child being moved to alternative provision.

Councillor Joy Squires, a Member of Worcester City Council was invited to address the Panel. She made the following points:

- Councillor Squires had previously been a member of the old-style Corporate Parenting Board and, in recent years, had become increasingly aware of kinship care, something that was supported by the

County Council.

- She had also recently become increasingly aware of the issues facing kinship carers and suggested that the Local Authority could do more to provide support for those undertaking kinship care. Usually, kinship carers were able to provide better care for children, much more cheaply. Often kinship carers were grandparents who had stepped in to look after their grandchildren, usually as a result of trauma, such as death, addiction, or mental health issues. These carers were having to deal with the trauma to their own children at the same time as taking on the care of their grandchildren.
- She had found that, for kinship carers, the level of support provided by the Local Authority was quite inconsistent. For example the children were often not offered the same level of support as other looked after children.
- Councillor Squires had found examples of grandparents who were left to apply for special guardianship orders without any Local Authority support, spending thousands of pounds of their own money to do so.
- Children being looked after by kinship carers did not appear to have the same fast track access to CAMHS as other looked after children.
- She concluded by reminding Members that kinship care was an important strand of the Looked After Children Strategy. There were currently over 50 kinship carers in Worcester and there was a need for consistency of support for these people who were often taking on this difficult task without asking for the job, without notice and without extra support.

Members were asked to consider whether they would wish to look at support for kinship carers at a future meeting. The Panel was reminded that the County Council had a Kinship Care Strategy and there were currently more than 100 kinship carers who were also approved foster carers, giving them access to the same support as other foster carers. However, it was acknowledged that there were some difficulties for those who were on the edge of care, where a child was not in care but was being looked after by a family member. There were currently 56 Special Guardianship Orders in Worcestershire and these families were supported by the Local Authority, including a package of generous financial support. Comparatively speaking, there is much that the County Council could be proud of in relation to

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kinship care, but that was not to say that the Authority could not do more.

In response, Councillor Squires reminded Members that she had spoken to many kinship carers and she suggested that the picture was not as straightforward as had been outlined. It was confirmed that, if Members were approached by kinship carers looking for more support, they should refer them to the access centre.

The Strategic Commissioner – Early Help and Partnerships and the Lead Commissioner: Children and Families and Public Health had been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on the re-design of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Paediatric Speech and Language Therapy Service (SALT).

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- The intention was to engage the Panel in the re-design of the CAMHS and SALT services in the wider context of the prevention and intervention strategy, with the aim of reducing demand on services.
- Officers were currently in the middle of needs assessments which involved analysing a wealth of data, benchmarking, and workshops with young people. Data included admissions, case studies and tracking of individual children, including those seen by early help providers. This would be completed by August 2015.
- There was currently a high level of concern about access to CAMHS, so much so that some high schools were now employing their own counsellors. The slow pace of referral was a cause for concern. School budgets were increasingly under pressure and school-based services were also under threat. There appeared to be an increasing need for these services and the issues around access were causing distress for children and their families. It was suggested that the service was as near to crisis without calling it a crisis. In response, it was acknowledged that there were a number of challenges currently facing CAMHS all of which were in the scope of the proposed service re-design, but it was too early to say how they would be tackled as there was a need to get further

under the skin of the issues.

- A question was asked about how schools were being involved in the needs assessments and whether school governors were aware of the process. Members were informed that an electronic survey had been sent to all schools and many responses had already been received. A CAMHS stakeholder group had also been set up with membership including representatives of schools.
- It was suggested that part of the role of scrutiny was to ensure the message was getting through. Members could support this as County Councillors and also as school governors. There was only so much that officers could do. This was a shared responsibility and officers needed wider support to spread the word. It was suggested that there was a need to ensure that all County Councillors were aware that this was going on.
- It was suggested that early help providers should also be involved and an example was given of the Wychavon early help provider funding a counsellor at Droitwich High School. The Director of Children's Services reminded Members that the onus was on schools to promote the health and well-being of their pupils. Some schools were recognising this and were using pupil premium funds to support this work. This was not just the responsibility of one agency. It required all to be involved in a joined up approach.
- A question was asked about the role of GPs and whether they were referring to CAMHS or to a school's pastoral service. It was suggested that, in the past, a GP might make a referral to CAMHS, only for the young person to fail to meet the threshold for intervention, resulting in them being referred back to the GP. It was confirmed that the referral process was now slicker and, if a child or young person did not meet the required threshold, they would be referred to the relevant early help provider.
- It was suggested that, following the needs assessment, the Panel should hold a fuller discussion to consider the way forward.
- Members were asked whether there were any particular areas that they would wish the needs assessment to test. It was suggested that self-harm and whether this was to some extent related to exam stress was a potential issue for consideration. It was possible that, by looking at the age of those accessing the service, it might be

possible to consider this hypothesis.

- It was confirmed that there would be a further opportunity to comment on proposals drawn up as a result of the needs assessment. As part of the development of the broader prevention and intervention strategy, further workshops to consider the proposals would be held in September. It was confirmed that Members and School Governors would be informed when the workshops were taking place.
- It was suggested that, although some children may not initially meet the required threshold for CAMHS intervention, as their problems got worse they may at some point in the future meet the threshold. It was suggested that earlier intervention might have prevented a problem escalating. It was confirmed that work would be done to look at the journeys of individual children and see whether earlier intervention would have made a difference. In relation to edge of care, it was also confirmed that consideration would be given to whether a delay in a CAMHS referral could make a child's situation worse and result in them becoming looked after.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

Chairman