

Agenda

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 18 November 2015, 10.00 am
County Hall, Worcester

All County Councillors are invited to attend and participate

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ। ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸਮਝਣ ਸਮਝ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਕਦੇ ਅਤੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਅਜਿਹੇ ਵਿਅਕਤੀ ਤੱਕ ਪਹੁੰਚ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਜੋ ਇਸਦਾ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਕਰ ਸਕੇ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਮਦਦ ਲਈ 01905 765765 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ। (Punjabi)

DISCLOSING INTERESTS

There are now 2 types of interests:
'Disclosable pecuniary interests' and **'other disclosable interests'**

WHAT IS A 'DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST' (DPI)?

- Any **employment**, office, trade or vocation carried on for profit or gain
- **Sponsorship** by a 3rd party of your member or election expenses
- Any **contract** for goods, services or works between the Council and you, a firm where you are a partner/director, or company in which you hold shares
- Interests in **land** in Worcestershire (including licence to occupy for a month or longer)
- **Shares** etc (with either a total nominal value above £25,000 or 1% of the total issued share capital) in companies with a place of business or land in Worcestershire.

NB Your DPIs include the interests of your spouse/partner as well as you

WHAT MUST I DO WITH A DPI?

- **Register** it within 28 days and
- **Declare** it where you have a DPI in a matter at a particular meeting
 - you must **not participate** and you **must withdraw**.

NB It is a criminal offence to participate in matters in which you have a DPI

WHAT ABOUT 'OTHER DISCLOSABLE INTERESTS'?

- No need to register them but
- You must **declare** them at a particular meeting where:
You/your family/person or body with whom you are associated have a **pecuniary interest** in or **close connection** with the matter under discussion.

WHAT ABOUT MEMBERSHIP OF ANOTHER AUTHORITY OR PUBLIC BODY?

You will not normally even need to declare this as an interest. The only exception is where the conflict of interest is so significant it is seen as likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest.

DO I HAVE TO WITHDRAW IF I HAVE A DISCLOSABLE INTEREST WHICH ISN'T A DPI?

Not normally. You must withdraw only if it:

- affects your **pecuniary interests OR** relates to a **planning or regulatory** matter
- **AND** it is seen as likely to **prejudice your judgement** of the public interest.

DON'T FORGET

- If you have a disclosable interest at a meeting you must **disclose both its existence and nature** – 'as noted/recorded' is insufficient
- **Declarations must relate to specific business** on the agenda
 - General scattergun declarations are not needed and achieve little
- Breaches of most of the **DPI provisions** are now **criminal offences** which may be referred to the police which can on conviction by a court lead to fines up to £5,000 and disqualification up to 5 years
- Formal **dispensation** in respect of interests can be sought in appropriate cases.

**Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Wednesday, 18 November 2015, 10.00 am, County Hall,
Worcester**

Membership

Councillors:

Ms L R Duffy (Chairman), Mrs F M Oborski (Vice Chairman), Mr R W Banks, Mr P Denham, Mrs J L M A Griffiths, Mr I Hopwood and Mr J W R Thomas

Co-opted Church Representatives (for education matters)

Bryan Allbut (Church of England) and Francis Mohan (Roman Catholic)

Parent Governor Representatives (for education matters)

Ms C Richardson (Parent Governor) and Vacancy

Agenda

Item No	Subject	Page No
1	Apologies and Welcome	
2	Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip	
3	Public Participation Members of the public wishing to take part should notify the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in writing or by e-mail indicating the nature and content of their proposed participation no later than 9.00am on the working day before the meeting (in this case 17 November 2015). Enquiries can be made through the telephone number/e-mail address below.	
4	Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting (previously circulated)	
5	Corporate Strategy Planning and 2016/17 Budget: Children's Services	1 - 4
6	Worcestershire Children's Safeguarding Peer Review	5 - 14

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Date of Issue: Tuesday, 10 November 2015

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 18 NOVEMBER 2015

CORPORATE STRATEGY PLANNING AND 2016/17 BUDGET: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Summary

1. As part of the Council's process for consultation on the 2016/17 budget, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Interim Director of Children's Services have been invited to discuss the budget challenges facing services in 2016/17 and how these are being addressed.

Background

2. The Council needs to ensure that it can continue to deliver services within a tight financial settlement and find solutions to deliver the necessary savings. The Council continues working to do things differently through the FutureFit programme, with a combination of efficiencies and savings proposals.
3. On 19 November 2015 the Cabinet will be considering the development of the Corporate Plan, FutureFit, and the next Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20, alongside savings proposals which have emerged from Corporate Strategy Planning 2015.
4. The report to Cabinet will set out the context for the budget, as well as feedback from local businesses and staff, the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities and a financial summary. The Cabinet report, including the savings proposals, will be available from 10 November 2015 and can be accessed on the Council's website [here](#).

Children and Families

5. Children's Services have responsibilities to all children in Worcestershire, including making sure all children have access to a place in a good school. We have a particular responsibility towards children who are vulnerable for any reason, to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities they have. Finally we have responsibilities to keep safe the small number of children who are at risk of significant harm, and may need to take some of these children into care.
6. Nine out of 10 schools in Worcestershire are rated as good or outstanding and 97% of children were allocated a place at a school which was one of their preferences. These achievements are impressive, but the Council's contribution is made more difficult as responsibilities and resources are reduced and also in large part transferred to schools (both academies and maintained). For this reason Learning and Achievement services have been externally commissioned and will be

delivered by Babcock International. Through increasing trading directly with schools, and the use of innovative delivery models, the infrastructure supporting school improvement and some pupil support functions could be maintained more efficiently and effectively than if the services remained in-house.

7. Early Help services, which offer targeted support for children, are being delivered in 6 area based contracts. They are being re-commissioned and integrated with the public health nursing responsibilities that are transferring to the Council. Even though savings will have to be made initially, the services need to become more focussed on addressing the symptoms which lead to children becoming in need of statutory interventions, and also to provide more case management capability for families at the edge of that intervention. A central part of this change will be to build on the success of the Connecting Families pilot, and take an holistic view of the needs of our families facing complex problems and having to engage with a large number of public agencies. This includes a focus on the adults in those families, since they are likely to be central to protecting children and also a potential source of risk.

8. The creation of a more effective “Family Front Door” which manages new work into both social care and early help services needs to ensure that all services have the capability to do effective work, enabling children to get the right service as quickly as possible. Social care services should only deal with children who meet the appropriate thresholds. This is because it is not in children’s interests to have cases escalated unnecessarily, as this can actually delay giving them access to the services that they need.

9. While urgent and decisive action needs to be taken to protect children from harm, there is a danger (in any local authority) that children can be further damaged by remaining in local authority care longer than necessary. Children have a right to a family life, and are best prepared for adulthood by experiencing it. Worcestershire can improve its performance in achieving permanency for children more quickly.

10. The Children’s Services workforce is no longer reliant on agency and temporary staff. It is critical that we develop and retain our staff, and this is another area where improvement is possible. Caseloads have fallen steadily over the last 6 months but need to fall further still. The two central issues in staff morale are the quality of front line management and having workloads that enable good quality work to be done.

11. The “back to basics” programme is designed to ensure that there is more consistency in social work practice, particularly in managing workflow, the timeliness and quality of assessments and reviews, having good plans and listening to the voice of the child at every stage.

12. The four main strands of work have been summarised as follows:

- Fixing the front door & ensuring children have their needs met appropriately by all services, not just in social care
- Securing permanency for children in care as quickly as possible
- Developing and retaining the Children’s Services workforce
- Continuous improvement in the consistency of social work practice through the back to basics programme.

13. These strands are mutually reinforcing. Improving outcomes for looked after children will also resolve the main savings issue. The Council has increased the budget for children's placements by £10.4m since 2010/11. As children achieve permanency more quickly, and as admissions to care are avoided, particularly for older children, spending on placements will fall. Even after account is made for continuing or additional spend on services for these children, significant savings will be possible, simply by doing the best thing for children.

Equality and Diversity Implications

14. Last year's budget scrutiny task group gave a "light touch" consideration to equalities issues raised by savings proposals and suggested that the Diversity Manager should be invited to the Panel to help members consider the Equalities Impact of each Corporate Strategy proposal.

Purpose of the meeting

15. The Panel is asked to consider and agree comments on the savings proposals for Children's Services, which the Chairman will feed back to the Budget Member Challenge Group.

Supporting Information

- Report to Cabinet on 19 November 2015 – available electronically only on the Council's website [here](#)

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 7 July 2015
- Agenda and Minutes of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 25 November 2014

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 18 NOVEMBER 2015

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PEER REVIEW

Summary

1. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the draft report on its scrutiny of the Directorate of Children's Services' response to the findings of the Children's Safeguarding Peer Review (attached as Appendix 1).

Background

2. In November 2014, Worcestershire County Council – as part of its desire to be a learning organisation – invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to help facilitate a Peer Review on its approach to safeguarding children. The Peer Review took place in April 2015. The County Council had previously invited the LGA to conduct a safeguarding peer review in October 2011.

3. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the outcomes of the Peer Review at its meeting on 25 June 2015 and was informed that the LGA team had identified the following four priorities:

- A 'back to basics' Safeguarding Improvement Plan
- Resolving the future direction for the 'Front Door'
- Implementing a detailed financial recovery plan
- Review and defining the role of Early Help

4. Panel Members agreed that they would wish to undertake further scrutiny work to consider the Directorate's response to these priorities.

Purpose of the Scrutiny

5. The Scrutiny Panel agreed to meet in small groups to further consider the detail of the four priorities identified by the Peer Review. These meetings took place between July and September 2015. It was further agreed that Members' comments would then be fed back to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families in order to inform future work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

6. The Panel's conclusion and recommendations are set out in paragraphs 5 to 9 in the attached report (Appendix 1).

Purpose of the Meeting

7. The Panel is asked to consider, comment on and agree the draft report.

Next Steps

8. Once agreed, the report will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board at its meeting on 2 December, after which it will be sent to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families in order to inform future work.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1: Comments from the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Worcestershire Children's Safeguarding Peer Review

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Email: worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk

Specific Contact Points for this report

Alyson Grice and Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, 01905 766619,

scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children's Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and minutes of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 25 June 2015
- [All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)

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Comments from Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Worcestershire Children's Safeguarding Peer Review

Background to the Scrutiny

1. In November 2014, Worcestershire County Council - as part of its desire to be a learning organisation - invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to help facilitate a Peer Review on its approach to safeguarding children. The Peer Review took place in April 2015. The County Council had previously invited the LGA to conduct a safeguarding peer review in October 2011.
2. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel ('the Scrutiny Panel') considered the outcomes of the Peer Review at its meeting on 25 June 2015 and was informed that the LGA team had identified the following four priorities:
 - A 'back to basics' Safeguarding Improvement Plan
 - Resolving the future direction for the 'Front Door'
 - Implementing a detailed financial recovery plan
 - Review and defining the role of Early Help
3. Panel Members agreed that they would wish to undertake further scrutiny work to consider the Directorate's response to these priorities.

Purpose of the Scrutiny

4. The Scrutiny Panel members agreed to meet in small groups to further consider the detail of the four priorities identified by the Peer Review. Members' comments would then be fed back to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families in order to inform future work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

5. It is clear that much of the ongoing improvement work and work initiated in response to the Peer Review is still at an early stage and it will take time before improvements will be seen. Therefore, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel would wish to receive an update in 6 months' time on progress against the four priorities identified in the Peer Review.
6. In particular, this update should include:
 - Progress against the 10 standards in the Safeguarding Improvement Plan;
 - Details of the implementation of the Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework;
 - Progress on the development of the scope and action plan for the Family Front Door;
 - Further feedback from the data analysis of the success of the Family Front Door Programme and any resulting action;
 - Progress on the development of the Early Help Strategy as part of the Prevention and Intervention Strategy.

- D R A F T -

- Progress on discussions with Early Help Providers about the impact of budget cuts to their contracts.
7. Given the predicted overspend for 2015/16, and in order to support this ongoing improvement work, Members would wish to see a major review of the Directorate's base budget to more accurately reflect the current budgetary position. This is particularly important given the concerns about the effectiveness of children's safeguarding in the County outlined in the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board's annual report for 2014/15. Panel Members look forward to hearing more about plans for the 2016/17 budget as part of the budget scrutiny process.
 8. Members were also concerned about the impact of reductions in partners' budgets. In particular there was concern that schools – and especially primary schools – would not have sufficient resources to be able to support safeguarding work. Concern remains that some children will fall through the net.
 9. In order to support improvement work, the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel would wish to be involved as appropriate in any future meetings with the Peer Review Team.

Findings

A 'back to basics' Safeguarding Improvement Plan

10. Members were informed that a structured framework around governance was being managed through the Safeguarding Improvement Board, a body chaired by the Chief Executive. A Safeguarding Improvement Plan had been developed which included 10 standards and would be implemented via a phased approach.
11. From May 2015, the focus had been on:
 - Seeing children
 - Effective management oversight
 - Evidence based and timely decision making and recording
 - Quality child protection enquiries
 - Implementation of the local assessment protocol
12. A Quality Assurance Framework would be implemented from September 2015.
13. Members recognise that measuring outcomes in child protection is complex and agreed that the focus was on making a difference to children's lives, ensuring a child centred approach and intervening at the right time to make a difference. Not every family needed a social worker; sometimes intervention in a crisis situation was sufficient.
14. Members welcomed the fact that, although in May 2015 only 60% of assessments were completed on time, this had now improved and 90% of assessments were being completed on time.

Resolving the future direction for the 'Front Door'

- D R A F T -

15. The 'Family Front Door' is a working term for a service that brings together the current functions within the Children's Social Care Access Centre, Early Help Hub and other services that make decisions around accessing services.
16. The Family Front Door Programme is part of the prevention and intervention agenda. A main aim is to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance in the workforce – for parents, young people and professionals – to help people make positive choices. The service aims to ensure that decision making is effective.
17. The Council is working with iMPower on a prevention analysis review project and data analysis headlines were shared with Members. Members were also informed about the primary success measures which are:
 - Reduced referrals into children's social care (More children, young people and families are being helped at an earlier stage)
 - Reduced contacts into the 'Front Door' (improved self service)
 - Improved conversion rate from 'contact to referral' (improved understanding and application of thresholds)
18. A number of quality metrics had also been developed in relation to how much and how well the Family Front Door performs.
19. The development of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is also important in relation to this work and is ongoing, with the aim that the MASH will support the speeding up of decision making.
20. In summary, Members acknowledged that the Family Front Door Programme was work in progress, and they understood that early work had suggested that there was scope for doing things more efficiently and thus creating capacity. Members acknowledged that there was a strong business case for effective early intervention, as the costs of late intervention could be huge.
21. However, the following concerns remained:
 - There was some doubt as to whether partners (in particular schools) would have the capacity and resources to do more. Given reduced resources, schools may increasingly focus on their core educational role, given the potentially serious consequences of not doing well in Ofsted Inspections.
 - The Health Visitor and the School Nursing Service should be properly wrapped into early intervention work, as they were the safety net for many families.
22. Members welcomed the focus on measuring success through data analysis and would welcome ongoing feedback on the results of this work.

Implementing a detailed financial recovery plan

23. The Directorate hoped that its medium term financial strategy would be more open and transparent and aimed to indicate clearly how each area of activity was doing financially. However, Members acknowledged that financial predictions were very difficult because the Directorate could never predict how many children would require

- D R A F T -

its services and for how long. For some service areas, one additional child entering the system might lead to a large amount of additional expenditure.

24. The Directorate also has a programme of cost reduction activities, such as the work being undertaken by the Fostering Team to increase recruitment of in-house foster carers and reduce the Council's reliance on more expensive agency placements. The Directorate has also recently invested in in-house supported living provision. Although there was an initial financial implication, this provision would be lower cost in the longer term.
25. Again in the longer term, early help arrangements should also help to bring down the number of children coming into care. So far, early help had had some impact on numbers of children coming into care, but not as great an impact as the Council would have wanted.
26. Improving adoption rates would also help in reducing the number of children in the care system. The Council's adoption rates had improved greatly in recent years, with more children being adopted each year. However, the courts had also had an impact on adoption, in that local authorities were now forced to look at every alternative option for a child before adoption could be considered. This had resulted in delay for a number of adoptions.
27. The Directorate's predicted overspend for 2015/16 was £5.8 million.
28. Members wished to highlight the following areas of concern:
 - The Council received a 'staying put' grant to support looked after young people post-18. Although work was ongoing to monitor this funding, there was some concern that the grant would not be sufficient, creating further budget pressures.
 - Members welcomed the financial analysis that was currently being carried out for the next 2 financial years but acknowledged that this was an art rather than an exact science and was subject to a margin of error.
 - Members were concerned that many of the budgetary pressures were out of the Directorate's control. Although forecasts for future placement levels could be made using placement history and trends, in the short term the Directorate had limited control over the number of children entering the system. Some areas of spend could be looked at (such as bringing more foster care in-house) but the amount of money saved was small in the context of the overall budget. It was not possible for the Council to refuse to take into care who had an assessed need.
 - In 4 years there had been an increase of 128 children looked after by the County Council. This reflected the national trend and the reasons for the rise in numbers are varied. Analysis of comparative data on the number of looked after children per 10,000 children under 18 shows that Worcestershire's rate is below the national average based on March 2014 figures.
29. Members felt that the large overspend for 2015/16 showed that the Service's base budget was not sufficient. Addressing the Directorate's budgetary issues should be a major priority for the Council given the concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding in the County outlined in the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board's annual report 2014/15.

- D R A F T -

Review and defining the role of Early Help

30. Work on this priority was still very much a work in progress, as part of the development of the prevention and intervention strategy. The Early Help Strategy would now become part of the Children and Families Prevention and Intervention Strategy (2015-2020), which would be Worcestershire-wide. The Council had recently taken on the responsibility for public health and the health visitor service and these services would be included in the strategy.
31. The peer review had suggested that there was some confusion between the Early Help Strategy and the Early Help Service which was commissioned out and run in each of the County's 6 district council areas. Early help was aligned with the Stronger Families programme which had so far supported over 1250 families.
32. The Early Help Strategy and Action Plan would be considered by Cabinet and the Health and Well-being Board in November.
33. The service had seen demand increase at the same time as the budget had decreased and it was clear there was now a need to think differently about service delivery. The current model of early help commissioning was not sustainable in the light of ongoing budget reductions.
34. In summary, Members acknowledged the level of challenge that the Council faces in terms of increased demand for early help services at a time of reduced budget. However, Members also noted that the service could not confidently say that all resources were being used completely effectively as there may be a certain level of duplication. Members welcomed the ongoing work to make sure money was spent more effectively.
35. However, Members wished to highlight the following concerns:
 - Other partners, including schools, do not necessarily have the budget or time to become involved in early help work. In particular, this would be a challenge for primary schools. Concern remains that some children will fall through the net.
 - It was suggested that there should be a focus on 'low level' mental health issues in schools, so that issues could be nipped in the bud before they became more serious.
 - There was concern that the current service level will not be enough to meet demand going forward.
 - It was acknowledged that outcomes for children who go into care are not always as good as for those who stay with their families. In support of the early help model, it is often best to continue to work with families for as long as possible.
 - There appears to be some uncertainty about the potential impact on the early help providers of any changes to their contracts. Managers were now exploring the implications of budget changes with providers. Members are concerned about any risks as a result of this uncertainty, including safeguarding risks, and risks to positive relationships with partners and the Council's reputation.
 - Concern was expressed about the impact on day nurseries of raising the minimum (living) wage. Some day nurseries may no longer be viable if no more funding is made available when they have to pay the living wage. The impact of this on families in need was a cause for concern.

- D R A F T -

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Methodology

Date of Meeting	
25 June 2015	Full Panel meeting to consider findings of the Children's Safeguarding Peer Review
30 July 2015	Representatives from the Panel (Paul Denham, Ian Hopwood and Fran Oborski) met with Hannah Needham, Strategic Commissioner, Children's Services to discuss 'Resolving the future direction for the 'Front Door' and 'Review and defining the role of Early Help'
5 August 2015	Representatives from the Panel (Lynne Duffy and Bob Banks) met Cath Knowles, Assistant Director for Assessment and Intervention and Diane Partidge, Strategic Lead: Improvement and Quality to discuss 'A back to basics' Safeguarding Improvement Plan'
10 September 2015	Representatives from the Panel (Paul Denham, Lynne Duffy, June Griffiths, Ian Hopwood, and Fran Oborski) met Steph Simcox to discuss 'Implementing a detailed financial recovery plan'

October 2015

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