

## Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

### Friday, 15 July 2016, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am

#### Minutes

#### Present:

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

#### Also attended:

Mr M L Bayliss, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families  
Mr J H Smith, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being  
Mr M E Jenkins  
Mrs M A Rayner  
Mrs E B Tucker

Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities), Dr Frances Howie (Interim Director of Public Health), Hannah Needham (Strategic Commissioner (Early Help and Partnerships)), Jodie Townsend (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 11 May 2016 (previously circulated).

(A copy of documents A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

#### 245 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Bryan Allbut and John Thomas.

#### 246 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

Councillor Banks – Independent Chair of Orchard and Spring Vale Children's Centre, Evesham  
Councillor Duffy – Independent Chair of WANDS Children's Centre, Droitwich  
Councillor Oborski – Chair of Wyre Forest Local Children's Trust

#### 247 Public

Two people spoke under public participation.

## Participation

Siani Driver, Worcestershire Mums Network: Siani was the founder of Worcestershire Mums Network which had over 4000 local members. Members of the groups were 100% opposed to the proposed cuts. Worcestershire's Early Years' Service had recently received an outstanding Ofsted report so why would the Council want to cut its funding?

She welcomed the meetings that were taking place in individual Children's Centres but questioned whether the final decision would be made by the Cabinet Member or by full Cabinet. There was a particular concern about services for 0-2 year olds. These services offered a vital resource for parents, providing social opportunities which were important for parental mental health.

Each health visitor currently had in the region of 400 families on their books and there was concern about the impact of the cuts on health visiting services, as well as midwife and other ante-natal services.

Concern was expressed about how those 'most in need' would be defined and identified, as it was suggested that all new parents needed support. The only reason behind the changes appeared to be financial.

The report to Cabinet had listed 18 Children's Centres that would be the subject of consultation, but it was not clear what would be happening to the others which were not listed. The staff in these Centres were also concerned.

Mair Sherliker, Breast Feeding Counsellor, Malvern Hills National Childbirth Trust:

Mair had submitted the following question:

'My colleague, Frances Thurlow, and myself facilitate, on a voluntary basis, a weekly drop-in Breast Feeding Support Group (Baby Latte) at both Evergreen Children's Centre in Malvern and Riverboats Children's Centre in Upton. We clearly may not be able to continue to provide this service to local mothers. Breastfeeding rates in the reach of these 2 Children's Centres have risen markedly.

One of the Government targets is to improve the life-chances and health outcomes of children in the early years. As breastfeeding impacts on these so positively, how does the Council propose ensuring that our services will continue to be available to all mothers?'

In addition, she informed the Panel that every mother that attended her support group was devastated by the proposed changes.

**248 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 May 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**249 The Provision of Effective Prevention Services for Children and Young People Including Optimising the Use of Children's Centre Buildings**

The Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Children and Families, and Health and Well-Being and the Director of Children, Families and Communities and Interim Director of Public Health had been invited to the meeting to discuss the Provision of Effective Prevention Services for Children and Young People Including Optimising the Use of Children's Centres Buildings.

Early years providers and representatives from schools had also been invited to the meeting.

On 16 June 2016, Cabinet had resolved that:

- a) the outcome of the procurement process for the integrated 0-19 prevention service set out in paragraph 3 of the Cabinet report be noted;
- b) the future plans for delivering effective prevention services, within the financial parameters set out in the report (particularly paragraphs 4 to 8 and 35 to 38) and the medium term financial plan be approved, subject to any required consultation as set out in the report;
- c) consultation on change of use for those children's centre buildings where there is likely to be significant change as outlined in paragraph 26 (b) and Appendix 2 with the addition of Brookside at Comberton Primary School – Wyre Forest be authorised;
- d) the proposals for the future use of children centre buildings where consultation is not required as outlined in paragraph 26 (c) and Appendix 2 other than in relation to Brookside at Comberton Primary School – Wyre Forest be approved;
- e) the summary of impact of the proposals for the future use of buildings as outlined in paragraphs 27 to 31 and the need for further equality impact

analyses to inform the final decisions in respect of the proposed changes outlined in paragraph 40 be noted;

- f) the final decisions for the use of children's centre buildings, where consultation is required, be delegated to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, having regard to the outcomes of those consultations and equality impact analyses; and
- g) the Director of Children, Families and Communities and the Interim Director of Public Health be authorised to take all necessary steps within their respective responsibilities to give effect to the above including varying and/or extending the existing contracts of the district-based early help providers and public health nursing functions, and the Director of Commercial and Change be authorised to agree appropriate terms for the future use of children's centre buildings.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, parts (c) to (g) were subsequently called-in. The call-in was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 1 July. The Board had agreed to accept the decisions taken at Cabinet. The Board did however agree to forward comments to Cabinet including:

- That the final decision on the use of children's centres buildings, where consultation is required, is made at full Cabinet and not by Cabinet Member Delegation;
- That the Children and Families O&S Panel should undertake further pre-decision scrutiny prior to the conclusion of the consultation.

By way of introduction, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families outlined the context of the Cabinet decision and subsequent consultation. In doing so he made the following main points:

- The County Council faced significant budgetary pressures as the result of reduced Government Grant and increased demand for services. For example, the need to keep young people safe had led to the Council spending an additional £10 million on Looked After Children. More people were living longer and this had meant an increase in the number needing support in frail old age. The proposals for Children's Centres needed to be

seen within that context. They were not the result of an ideological whim, but a response to the need to balance the books. To keep the Council within its budget envelope, it had to make hard choices and there were no easy options left. The Council had a legal duty to set a balanced budget. It was proposed that the service budget would be reduced from £4.5 million to £3 million.

- The issue of whether the final decision would be made at full Cabinet or by Cabinet Member delegation would be discussed by Cabinet on 21 July.
- At the start of the consultation, it was not possible to guarantee what the service mix would be. The aim was to maximise the offer at each centre.
- It was a legal requirement to consult when proposing major service changes. The Cabinet Member reminded the Panel that no Children's Centre would be closing. He was unclear as to why service users would be devastated by the proposals as the Council had not yet given the detail of what would be happening. He was keen to maintain the current range of services delivered by volunteers as this was one way to 'spread the jam'.

The following points were made in the subsequent discussion:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Public Health confirmed that, from a public health perspective, he wanted to maintain as many services as possible and to reach those families who were most in need. He confirmed that, although some services may be 'nice to have', the financial situation meant it may not be possible to keep all of them.
- He assured those present that he would study the consultation responses closely and would be open to all suggestions, only making a final decision at the end of the process.
- Members were reminded that the financial envelope was shrinking all the time and the Council had to save approximately £100 million over the next 4 years. The CMR for Public Health acknowledged that this was not what he and many colleagues had come in to Local Government to do.
- The Strategic Commissioner (Early Help) reminded the Panel that it was still the Directorate's vision to develop a 0-19 service

which brought together public health services and Children's Centres, with access to services being via a 'proportionate universalism' approach. There was clear evidence that those living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage suffered greater incidences of poor housing, debt and health issues. There was a clear expectation that Early Years providers would spend more time in these areas.

- The Interim Director of Public Health reminded Members that services had built up over time and were not always delivered in a single way. This was a chance to take a more structured approach to how the money was spent. There had been no changes in the statutory requirements. Health visitors played a large role in defining risk and need, both for individuals and for communities. The difference between advantaged and disadvantaged was an ongoing concern, including breast feeding rates and levels of school readiness. This was an opportunity to take a rational, planned approach and create an integrated service based on evidence.
- Concern was expressed that, although health visitors worked well, lots of new mothers did not see their health visitor. It was suggested that, by removing services, more people would be pushed into the category of greatest need. Although some areas of the County were clearly socio-economically disadvantaged, there were also pockets of hidden disadvantage in more prosperous areas.
- It was suggested that staff at one Children's Centre had been told that the building would remain open but no services would be provided. The CMR for Families and Children reiterated that no decisions had yet been made and the proposals were still out for consultation. However, he said it was clear that, given financial pressures, a different and lower mix of services would be provided after the consultation. He was working with Early Health providers on this and was keen to seek to maintain as many voluntary services as possible. Schools were also keen to play their part.
- In response, the representative of the Worcestershire Mums Network informed Members that she currently helped to run a voluntary group which linked with health visitors and County Council staff to signpost parents to support such as mental health services and peer support.

Running this group was really difficult. Many of the people involved were working mums and it was sometimes a struggle to have enough people available to run the group.

#### Discussion with Early Help Providers

Claire D'Arcy and Mel Bailey of 10:32/Barnardos and Liz Griffiths of Bromsgrove and Redditch Early Help attended the meeting. During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The providers understood that this was a very difficult situation and appreciated that the Local Authority had to balance the books. Early Years providers also had to balance their books.
- There was a mismatch between consultation processes as the providers also had to talk to their staff about possible changes. Current contracts ran until 30 September. After this, providers had been told that they would have to balance the books and run services with only 50% of the current budget. 50% less resources would mean 50% less staff and the providers had to start consultation with staff as part of the redundancy process in order to meet employment law requirements. 50% less resources would mean it would be impossible to continue to deliver all current services.
- It was suggested that the majority of current services were not 'nice to have'. These services had been stopped following previous cuts. Providers were now looking at a radically different model and it was suggested that service users had a right to be aware of this.
- It was suggested that cuts to services would further reduce opportunities for preventative services to be provided and it was difficult to see where these would be in the future.
- The Strategic Commissioner (Early Help) reminded the Panel that she was currently in discussion with providers and she was keen to understand the impact of the budget cuts. She was working with partners to make the changes as smooth as possible. There was currently a degree of duplication in the system and she was keen to focus on what was needed in a push for further efficiency.
- The CMR for Children and Families recognised that this was a painful time and he informed Members that he was not trying to hide the

implications for staff of the proposed changes. He reminded the Panel that every part of the County Council had had significant budget reductions. The Council had no alternative but to manage within its budget and these proposals were an attempt to find the best way forward.

- In response to a question about the number of staff affected, the representatives of 10:32/Barnardos informed the Panel that they would lose 25 staff which was 50% of the current complement. They currently had 3 family support teams which would be cut to 1, with 21 fte staff being reduced to 6. This would dramatically reduce the amount of work that could be done and in future there would be a focus on evidence based group activity.
- It was important to be clear about how those who were most in need of services were identified. Some areas of the county – for example Bromsgrove – had 'hotspots' of need which were diluted by more affluent areas around them.
- In response to a question about whether need for the service had increased or decreased in recent years, Members were informed that it was difficult to say. The volume of people accessing 10:32/Barnardos services had increased exponentially from 4000 in 2013 to 12,500 in 2015. Whether this was because of greater need or because more people were aware of the service was not clear. The gut feeling of those running the service was that there was a greater level of need together with a reduction in other available sources of support.
- A question was asked about whether the increase in the number of looked after children could be linked to the reduction in early help services. In response, it was suggested that it was not that simple. However, the Early Help Strategy and the providers had achieved a great deal and had been able to prevent families' problems escalating to the point where they needed social care. If the buffer was removed, the Council would see an increase in demand for social care.
- It was suggested that the Council's policy of trying to prevent future need for social care was unlikely to be successful if early help services were cut. In response, Members were informed that this was not easily measurable.
- The Director of Children's Services reminded the Panel that there needed to be a focus on evidence and causation. An extra £10 million had been



allocated to the budget for looked after children and the Council currently had 704 children in care, a relatively high figure. At the same time the Council has invested more and more in early help. So, there had been an increase in early help spending at the same time as a significant increase in the number of looked after children. It was important that, at a time of scarce resources, every £ spent was evidence based.

- The challenge was to work in a different way but this might run the risk that some children were inadvertently pushed into the care of the local authority, something that the Council was keen to avoid, as evidence showed that looked after children had significantly worse life chances.
- The representative of Redditch and Bromsgrove Early Help informed the Panel that evidence showed that universal services allowed providers to support more vulnerable families in a better way, in a community base with a range of support services.
- Members were informed that all providers had been given a new service specification which gave them a steer on what would be expected. The CMR for Children and Families agreed that a copy of the specification could be provided to the Panel.
- It was suggested that it would be helpful for the Panel to see the old and new service specifications and a comparison of previous funding levels and new funding levels for each area.

#### Discussion with Schools

Paul Freear, (Comberton Primary School, Kidderminster), Melanie Cooper and Julie Wills (Upton on Severn Primary School), and Val Weddell-Hall and Elizabeth Lazenby (Franche Primary School, Kidderminster) attended the meeting. During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- Franche Primary School had been involved with Chestnuts Children's Centre since 2005. It was suggested that there was currently a degree of duplication of services and some parents felt there was too much provision. There was a need to reconfigure services and Franche Primary School was confident that this could be done.
- The Headteacher of Comberton Primary School informed Members that the services provided before children arrived at school were very

valuable. He wanted to see a fairness in approach and did not want to see a fight between the Children's Centre and the school. The building would be a valuable resource for the school and the school would want to work closely with the early years provider. As a headteacher, he understood the money driven approach but there was also a need to look at the outcomes. There was a need for some smart decisions on where to spend the available money. There was a need for a fairness of approach, avoiding a focus on what was financially easiest to cut.

- Riverboats Children's Centre in Upton was built in 2011 and included a new pre-school which had since gone from strength to strength. However, the number of 2 year olds that could be accommodated was capped due to the size and there was now a need to broaden pre-school provision. Currently the Children's Centre building was closed on Thursdays and Fridays and the school wished to use the building on these days. The School Governors were very mindful of the available budget. The Headteacher reminded Members of the impact of Early Years provision and suggested that children would often speak to teachers about issues when they would not want to speak to other professionals. She felt passionately that the school could make this work.
- Members were reminded that funding for 2 and 3 year olds was shortly due to be increased.
- The Headteacher of Upton Primary School informed Members that she was disappointed that the NCT felt it would no longer be able to run breast feeding groups, as the school would want to support this work. In response the representative of the NCT said that she was relieved and excited that the breast feeding support group may be able to continue if the school took over the Children's Centre.
- The vision was to create a structure for the future provision of services for 0-19 year olds, including working with the local high school. The aim was to make the Children's Centre building living and thriving every day.
- Franche Primary School was keen to maintain services for the future, including speech and language and breast feeding support. Where rooms were currently left empty, the school could use these spaces and maximise the use of available buildings.
- It was important to remember that different

schools were in different situations. Some schools (such as St Mary's in Kidderminster) did not have such a positive relationship with the local early years provider.

- The CMR for Children and Families thanked the school representatives for attending the meeting and informed the Panel that he had heard a similar positive message from other schools. Schools were willing to engage positively. He acknowledged that there were barriers in particular areas but officers were working to overcome these. He suggested that the way to make this work was to have good will on both sides to achieve integration and maintain a good service for children and young people.
- In discussing breast feeding support it was agreed that it was important to remember those mothers who were unable to breast feed.
- One Member informed the Panel that, although he had initially had concerns about the proposals, many of his fears had been answered by the positive messages he had heard. He had been concerned about different organisations sharing premises, but could now see that it was possible to make better use of facilities.
- He remained concerned about service overlap, something which could not be indulged, and welcomed the attempts to make better use of resources.
- It was confirmed that, following the proposed changes, the expectation was that all Children's Centres would continue to meet the Government's SureStart definition.
- Another Panel Member stated that she had been encouraged by the schools' contributions and could see that there were clear avenues for parents to access services.
- It was suggested that communication would be the key to success and to strengthening the relationship between schools and Children's Centres.
- Local Members would have an important role in supporting this work. It was suggested that some local Members may have to be encouraged to take on this role.
- A question was asked about those Children's Centres which were not being integrated with schools, for example WANDS in Droitwich. There would be a need to replicate best practice. In response, the CMR agreed that this was a difficult issue and, although it was a challenge, he would

aim for best practice to be replicated in all Centres. Members were reminded that, at Comberton Primary School, the Children's Centre was not being integrated into the school, it was simply a shared use of the building.

- The CMR for Health and Well-Being thanked those who had attended the meeting and said it was crucial to hear from those at the coalface. The input of those who were actually delivering the services was needed.
- It was suggested that some people who would benefit from support were reluctant to ask for help as they actually believed that social workers would take their children away. People tended to have greater trust in schools and the voluntary sector, and families in need were often more likely to talk to schools.
- It was confirmed that Action for Children were no longer providing services at the Children's Centre in Upton.

Panel Members were then given the opportunity to ask further questions about the proposals. The following main points were raised:

- In response to a question about how decisions about services will be made, Members were informed that these would be based on the service specification but there was scope for flexibility with regard to levels of need.
- The services provided would be monitored via an annual review of how the buildings were being used in relation to SureStart. It had previously been suggested that Ofsted would inspect Children's Centres but this had now been put on hold, although Officers were working on the basis that there would be some form of inspection regime at some point. It was confirmed that monitoring would not be based on KPIs but on an analysis of whether providers were delivering what was set out in the lease. The relationship between schools and private providers would be part of this conversation.
- Concern was expressed about access to services for those living in the areas of highest need. Many people were unable to afford cars or bus fares and it would be a challenge to travel distances to get to a Children's Centre. The Strategic Commissioner confirmed that many of the services were provided in families' homes as it was not a buildings-based service.

- It was confirmed that that there would be a slight delay in the implementation date as a result of the call-in, which had led to the consultation period being extended. Implementation was more likely to start from 1 October with a full start date of 1 December. This was likely to have financial implications. However, the CMR stated that it was important to do the right thing and be seen to do the right thing. He wanted there to be lots of opportunities to hear everyone's views. This may take longer and there would be some budgetary impact, but it was important to get it right.
- A question was asked about whether the proposals had been future-proofed to allow for the 1000s of new houses that were due to be built in Worcestershire, 40% of which would be social housing. It was confirmed that this had been taken into account, but there was a need to get under the skin to make an informed view. Officers were not yet at that stage. The CMR reminded the Panel that half of the planned houses had already been built and the strategy had been to bolt big new developments on to urban areas, areas that were already served by Children's Centres. He confirmed that the impact of new housing would be kept under review.
- In response to a question about how cuts would be distributed across the centres, Members were informed that there was an agreed funding formula based on 70% need and 30% population.
- It was agreed that, where services were being re-located, accessibility and transport routes would need to be taken into account.
- Questions and issues had been received from Bryan Allbut (Church Representative) and Rachel Jenkins (County Councillor). It was agreed that these would be forwarded to Officers for consideration as part of the consultation.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am

Chairman .....