

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 31 August 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
Ms P Agar
Ms P A Hill
Mr S E Geraghty, Leader and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance
Mr R M Udall
Derek Benson, Independent Chairman, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Board

Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities), Dr Frances Howie (Director of Public Health), Liz Altay (Public Health Consultant), Hannah Needham (Strategic Commissioner (Early Help and Partnerships)), Sue Haddon, Jodie Townsend (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) and Samantha Morris (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 15 July 2016 (previously circulated).

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

250 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from John Thomas and Bryan Allbut.

251 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

252 Public Participation

Councillor Hopwood – Daughter sometimes works with the NCT.

Frances Thurlow

Frances submitted the following questions:

- Can you clarify what the purpose of children's centres are?
- Does rising levels of children in care mean children's centres failed in their purpose?
- What % of families with small children use the children's centres?
- How will the closure of children's centres affect the rates of breastfeeding?
- How will volunteers maintain services currently offered by children's centres?

Hannah Cooper, Branch Coordinator (volunteer), Malvern Hills NCT

Hannah submitted the following questions:

- What services specifically for antenatal and postnatal parents will be left?
- What provision will there be for children 0-2?
- If the hardest to reach parents aren't accessing Children's Centres as Catherine Driscoll claims then what are the council's plans to meet this need I with their new vision and on a reduced budget?

Lottie Smith, Worcester Mums Network

Lottie Smith read out a statement on behalf of Worcester Mums Network suggesting that there was no evidence that there would be any benefits from funding cuts to Children's Centres, that there would be an increased reliance by the County Council on the good will of volunteers and that the reductions were political. Children and families in need of help would not necessarily be identified and would suffer as a consequence.

253 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 July 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**254 Worcestershire
Safeguarding
Children Board
Annual Report
2015-16**

Derek Benson, Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) appointed on 1 April 2016 attended the meeting to present the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2015-16.

In September 2015, Diana Fulbrook, then Independent Chair, informed the Panel that WSCB could not be assured of the effectiveness of local arrangements in respect of children in the child protection system. The quality and consistency of frontline basic practice needed improvement and more work was required in particular areas to ensure children are safe in Worcestershire.

As of 31 March 2016 and now, the view of the WSCB was that it couldn't be assured as to the robustness of the child protection system and that this was clearly a risk for everyone to consider and address. The Board formed this view by taking into account evidence from data, audits, reports and learning during 2015/16. These processes however, demonstrated that there was a strong commitment to safeguarding children across the WSCB partnership and that safeguarding arrangements were in place, they just needed to be better more co-ordinated to deliver a better service for the children and young people in Worcestershire. Demand for services across the whole system continued to increase and, whilst recognising that improvements had been made to some aspects of frontline social work practice, other practice improvements had not been achieved as quickly as had been hoped at the start of the year.

During 2015/16, the Board's priorities were:

- Implementation of the Board's Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Strategy
- Early Help
- Integrated Family Front Door (FFD) (incorporating the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub ethos)
- Children's Social Care 'Back to Basics' Improvement Programme

As of August, the key messages from the Service Improvement Board were:

- LAC and children on a Child Protection Plan were being seen and visited within required timescales
- Missing children return interviews were now being completed (100%)
- CSE/Missing children was gaining traction at the FFD and delivering results for young people and

efficiencies for staff and partners.

The other issues from 2015/16 worthy of note were that:

- No Serious Case Reviews were initiated during the year, although a number of cases were brought for consideration.
- Only a relatively small number of child deaths were found to have modifiable factors. Cumulative data in respect of babies whose deaths were classified as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) suggested that smoking and co-sleeping were often significant factors. In the deaths of unborn or extremely young babies factors such as maternal obesity, smoking, alcohol and other environmental factors were often present in some combination.
- Learning from Multi-Agency Case File audits (MACFAs) undertaken during the year had informed a number of the Board's priority work streams for 2016/17:
 - Voice of the Child/child's lived experience (limited evidence of child's voice being used to inform assessments or decisions)
 - Review of safeguarding arrangements for disabled children (some evidence of drift where there were concerns about neglect of disabled children)
 - Professional Curiosity and Think Family (half of all cases reviewed had a combination of domestic abuse, parental mental ill health or parental drug/alcohol use)
 - CSE and missing children (in all cases reviewed multi-agency safeguarding practice was judged 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement')

In summary, the WSCB reported that during 2015/16 it fulfilled its statutory functions. A new structure had been implemented which enabled clearer oversight from the Board to the sub groups. Funding had been sustained at the current level for a number of years in spite of competing financial pressures for the partner agencies.

The Board concluded that the body of evidence from data, audits, reports and learning during 2015/16 demonstrated that there was a strong commitment to safeguarding children across the Worcestershire partnership and that safeguarding arrangements were in place. Demand for services across the whole system continued to increase and, whilst recognising that

improvements had been made to some aspects of frontline social work practice, other practice improvements had not been achieved as quickly as had been hoped at the start of the year.

Whilst recognising that strategies were in place to improve frontline practice, the Board couldn't yet be assured about the robustness of the child protection system and this remained a risk. Further assurance was required as to the effectiveness of the wider Early Help offer and whether it was sufficiently targeted, albeit it was recognised that the quality of provision by local authority commissioned providers was good. It was clearly important that children and families received the right services at the right time. The impact of the Integrated FFD and the revised Levels of Need guidance would be monitored, as would the need for all partners to play their full part in the provision of support services to children and families at the earliest opportunity to prevent escalation of need and risk.

The Board recognised that these were challenging times for partner agencies, many of whom were facing reductions in resourcing. In this climate of competing demands, however, there was evidence of some partners investing in their safeguarding services which is indicative of the strong commitment across the WSCB partnership to prioritise the protection of children.

During the opportunity for questions, the following main points were made:

- In response to the concern raised about Elective Home Education (EHE) in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children (GRT) and whether they were receiving appropriate education. It was confirmed that it was on the WSCB's radar.
- There was also a concern about how EHE was monitored and how safeguarding issues were identified.
- Taking into account the funding reductions proposed for early help services, it was necessary to have the detail of the reductions before the impact could be understood.
- It was noted that missing children had increased from 194 in 2014/15 to 311 in 2015/16; this was thought to be as a result of a change in recording methods and better partner agency working in taking missing children seriously.
- It was confirmed that the WSCB had been given the opportunity to feed into the Consultation

255 The Provision of Effective Prevention Services for Children and Young People Including Optimising the Use of Children's Centres Buildings

process in respect of the Provision of Effective Prevention Services for Children and Young People including Optimising the Use of Children's Centres Buildings.

- In terms of the effectiveness of the strategies for identifying children in need, it was confirmed that the FFD was the right direction of travel but that it was early days.
- In response to the question as to whether Worcestershire had a range of evidence based services to assess and meet the needs of children and their families, the Panel were advised that there was a range of services but that they needed continuous improvement and holding to account.

The Chairman of the Panel thanked the Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board for attending the meeting and said she looked forward to working closer with the WSCB in future.

The Cabinet Members with Responsibility (CMR) for Children and Families and Health and Well-being and the Director of Children, Families and Communities and Interim Director of Public Health were invited to the meeting to discuss the Provision of Effective Prevention Services for Children and Young People Including Optimising the Use of Children's Centre Buildings.

The Panel had previously met to discuss the issue on 17 March and 15 July 2016 and the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) had considered a call-in of the Cabinet decision of 16 June 2016 on 1 July 2016. (Agenda and Minutes of these meetings were available on the Council's website at:

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/democratic-services/minutes-and-agendas.aspx>

The Chairman of the Panel had subsequently requested further information (detailed in the Agenda report) to enable the Panel to discuss the detail further.

The CMR for Children and Families opened the discussion by explaining that the Consultation had finished but that no decisions had been made whilst consideration was being given to the emerging themes from the Consultation. He believed that the process had been as open and transparent as was possible, there had been considerable discussion and media briefings and that this would continue.

440 responses to the Consultation had been received, the emerging themes were:

- The universal provision eg Stay and Play
- Capability of the new leaseholders
- Specific site concerns
- Budget reductions

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The purpose of children's centres was to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities, particularly for those families in greatest need of support.
- Up to 50% of families with small children may use the Children's Centres at any one time.
- There was and would continue to be a variety of support for breast feeding mothers available in Worcestershire.
- The number of looked after children (LAC) in Worcestershire had increased over recent years and was currently at approximately 700. Although this figure changed on a daily basis, if the number of LAC continued to increase at its current rate and reached 900, it would be considered a failure for Worcestershire County Council. It was well known that the outcomes for LAC were significantly worse than for those children not in care, it was therefore important to target those most in need to give appropriate support to help reduce the numbers of LAC and prevent children from entering care.
- At a time of austerity, it was very important to have a joined up approach to delivering services and be clear about what services the County Council and its partners were able to provide.
- Volunteers working with commissioned providers would continue to be important to service delivery.
- In terms of addressing concerns about specific Children's Centres, the CMR reassured the Panel that the Council would continue to work with providers.
- Although the Panel were advised that the Children's Centres hadn't made the impact on reducing the numbers of LAC originally envisaged, it was suggested that evidence to substantiate this had not been provided either. In response, the Panel was advised that there had been a national evaluation of Children's Centres and the original

vision which was to target those most in need hadn't been met. When evaluated many LAC hadn't accessed early help services and given that the County Council had less money to spend, it needed to target help where it was most needed. It may not necessarily be valued in the same way but that was the reality of the situation.

- There was a concern that as the County Council made further reductions to its budget; its capacity for delivery would also reduce with demand outstripping supply. Feedback from Action for Children suggested that budgetary cuts would result in staff reductions of 70 to 17.
- Unfortunately, Children's Centres hadn't generally reached the children who were or about to become LAC. A national evaluation had confirmed that the original vision to target those most in need had not been met and LAC hadn't accessed Children's Centres. Unfortunately at a time when the Authority had less money, it was necessary to target help where it was most needed.
- The universal services provided by midwifery and health visiting would screen and identify those most in need of help.
- It was difficult for the Panel to give a considered opinion without access to the Consultation responses.
- The Panel were disappointed that the list provided at Appendix A of the Children's Centres showing proposed future use had vague descriptions of the services that were being proposed to be continued to be delivered and those no longer being delivered. The description quite often said 'these services may continue to be offered at alternative location' but didn't specify which services or where.
- The CMR advised that Panel that he thought that the Panel's requests for information and questions had been answered in the most transparent way possible with as much information as possible but that it was impossible to provide absolute information at this stage.
- Cllr Richard Udall, Chairman of OSPB attended the meeting and referred to the call-in considered by the OSPB on 1 July 2016 and the letter sent to the Cabinet following this. He pointed out that he was disappointed that a reply to this letter had not been received. The CMR confirmed that the Leader had advised that the final decision on the use of Children's Centres buildings would remain as a Cabinet Member delegated decision and that

this process was as clear and transparent as the issue being considered in a public meeting of Cabinet.

- The two children centres not owned by the County Council were not under direct control of the County Council.
- In response to the suggestion that delivering services in a targeted way would result in a postcode lottery, it was confirmed that geographical clustering, the index of social deprivation and individual family needs identified through needs assessment would help to decide where help was required.
- There was a concern that there would be more reliance on volunteers going forward, but the Panel were advised that the early help providers would be expected to recruit, train and look after volunteers.
- It was questioned whether all avenues had been explored in terms of options for future service delivery. It was confirmed that there had been some market testing and that the Authority were open to any ideas in order to deliver the service in the best way possible.
- In terms of the universal support required for mental health conditions such as post-natal depression, it was confirmed that Worcestershire had a mother and baby unit and community facilities. The Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) were also working with Herefordshire to bid for some additional funding in this area.
- The Marmot Review, which identified an evidence based strategy to address the social determinants of health, the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age and which could lead to health inequalities was being taken into account in determining how services should be delivered.

The Chairman thanked the CMR and Officers for attending the meeting and it was agreed that:

- A list of the services being provided in all of the Children's Centres when final decisions had been made would be circulated to all Members of the Council.
- During the transition period, details of the early help providers would be given to the Panel.
- When the Cabinet Member decision was published the Panel would be asked to provide comments to the Chairman

- Scrutiny would receive an update on progress spring 2017.

The meeting ended at 11.50 am

Chairman