

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 22 November 2016, County Hall, Worcester - 2.00 pm

Present:

Minutes

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

Also attended:

Mr M L Bayliss, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families
Mrs E B Tucker
Jane Stanley, Worcestershire Healthwatch

Sandy Bannister (Corporate Equality and Diversity Manager), Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities) and Tina Russell (Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Childrens Social Care))

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation: Futurefit - Proposals for Change and Reform to Support the Medium Term Financial Plan: Children and Families (circulated to Members after the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 August 2016 (previously circulated).

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

256 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from John Thomas.

257 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families declared an interest as his sister worked for the County Council on the Connecting Families Programme.

258 Public Participation

None.

259 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 August 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Meeting

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Futurefit - Proposals for Change and Reform to Support the Medium Term Financial Plan: Children and Families

As part of the Council's development of the 2017/18 budget, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Director of Children, Families and Communities had been invited to discuss the budget challenges facing services in 2017/18 and how these were being addressed. All Panel Members had received a copy of the 17 November 2016 Report of Cabinet: FutureFit – Proposals for Change and Reform to Support the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery (copies of which were circulated to the Panel electronically after the meeting). In setting the context of Children's Services position, the main points made were:

- The Council had existing plans to deliver c£13m of savings, with a further £6.8m of proposals for savings being finalised for 2017/8 (of which £1m related to Children's Services) and £2m raised through work with District Councils.
- Since 2013/14, £14.6m had been invested in Children's Services of which, £11.3m was for children's social care.
- Over the same period, there had been £18.4m of savings relating mainly to education and early help.
- In 2015/16, there had been a budget overspend of c£5.8m.
- £4.5m had been invested in 2016/17 and was reducing to £3m in 2017/18.
- There were plans in place to reduce the spend on children's social care placements by £2.015m (including the £1.5m removal of investment plus an additional £1m reduction in 2017/18).
- The Service would continue to increase the capacity of in-house units, reduce the reliance on more expensive agency placements for children by increasing the number of children living with families and in more permanent settings, reducing the time they needed to stay in the care system and looking at short break alternatives for children with disabilities.
- The Work streams that the Service was concentrating on were:
 - Changing the culture
 - Improving the entry point into social care
 - Achieving permanency more quickly

- High cost placements
- Placement and Sufficiency Strategy
- The main risks associated with these were:
 - Insufficient suitable properties available
 - More children entering care than expected
 - Delays in moving children through the system
 - Agencies not playing their full part in managing demand
 - Staff recruitment and retention

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families acknowledged the priority that the Council had given Children's Services in recent years, particularly Children's Social Care. He was grateful for the ongoing financial investment that Children's Services had received at a time when significant financial cuts were being made.
- In response to the Chairman of the Panel inviting the Corporate Equalities and Diversity (E&D) Manager to comment on the Equality Relevance Screening, carried out in respect of the concept papers being developed for new savings proposals, the E & D Manager flagged up that further analysis would be required for the short break alternatives for children with disabilities proposal.

Although the Panel acknowledged that they had been invited to make suggestions to fill the forecast financial planning gap, they were not minded to make suggestions at this point given that the outcomes of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services was awaited and could influence the direction of the savings plans.

261 Children's Social Care Safeguarding Assurance Update

The Chairman welcomed Tina Russell, who had recently been appointed as Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care).

At its meeting on 31 August 2016, the Panel considered the Worcestershire Children's Safeguarding Board (WSCB) Annual Report 2015-16. This report concluded that whilst improvements were being made the WSCB did not feel able to give assurance that child protection systems were sufficiently robust. In light of this, the Panel had requested an update in respect of what action was being taken to address the concerns in respect of safeguarding assurance.

It was important to note that effective and robust child protection and safeguarding practice relied on a range of interrelated activities led by the Local Authority (LA) Children's Social Work service and implemented with the support of partners who had a duty and responsibility to support the LA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The Service Improvement Plan addressed the concerns identified by Internal Quality Assurance processes and the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review 2015. The Key developments in this area were:

- Refreshed Thresholds Guidance had been re-launched as Levels of Need Guidance on 4 July 2016.
- The new Family Front Door (FFD) came into effect on 4 July 2016 and was currently subject to a three month review of Phase One. Contact with the Children's Services FFD was now made by telephone if concerns required immediate action, or by the online Cause for Concern Notification form.
- For professionals, there was a dedicated cause for concern professional portal to register a cause for concern form and check details of children open to Children's Social Care.
- In line with development of the FFD, Phase One of the Locality Safeguarding Teams re-design began with a large scale review of case work to address drift and delay in plans for children. This work would inform the final organisational design.
- There had been service development in performance information and practice standards for social workers. Standards relating to the process and timeliness of practice were complete and there was now consistent performance management in place throughout the levels of management.
- Work was progressing to the address the quality of practice and learning and development needs of the organisation.

In terms of Safeguarding Assurance:

- Worcestershire's Early Help offer was subject to review to ensure services were appropriately targeted at the most vulnerable children and hard to reach families.
- As part of the FFD Phase One evaluation, further

developments had taken place to improve information sharing, understanding and application of thresholds:

- Development of the Concern Contact Form to identify concerns for the welfare of children in order that these can be identified without delay and be passed to the qualified Social Workers at the FFD for a decision on the most appropriate level of response.
 - Implementation of a Referral Outcome letter to professionals that identified the rationale and the determined level of need. This would give partners clear understanding of the rationale and promote a focused professional conversation using the level of need where there were any disputes in decision making.
 - Review of the Domestic Abuse (DA) triage processes to include agreed descriptors of risk and a single record of outcome from triage for each agency.
 - Apportionment of a dedicated Initial Screening and Contact Officer (ISCO) to manage DA notifications to schools to ensure they received timely information and outcomes of all notifications received and managed through the triage process.
 - Development of a Single Social Work Assessment as opposed to Brief and Extended Assessments. This would reduce duplication and "stop start" social work.
- A whole system approach had been adopted as the back to basics Service Improvement Plan progressed.
 - A priority in this work was to establish a stable and permanent workforce. A Workforce Strategic Board had been established and a dedicated social work recruitment service for Children and Adults came into operation on 14 November 2016.
 - There was a new process for the authorisation of Legal Planning Meetings (LPM) and Care Proceedings to ensure that there was a clear line of accountability for decision making and consistency in good practice processes. This would prevent drift and delays where children subject to child protection plans were not achieving outcomes and where children in care under S20 Voluntary Arrangements were not achieving permanency in a timely way.
 - There were new processes for the authorisation of children entering and those under s20 leaving the care system to ensure that there was clear evidence of the rationale for how decisions had been made in the best interests of children and ensure clear

accountability at each management level.

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

- The Panel were supportive of the referral outcome letter designed to keep professionals updated.
- In response to the concern expressed about a stable and permanent workforce, as this had seemed to have been an ongoing issue for many years, the Panel were advised that there were a number of issues around the workforce which needed resolving but were complex. For example there were instances where a market supplement had been used to provide an uplift in salary to retain staff but this had a knock on effect for other staff in terms of grading issues. Such issues needed addressing in a strategic way and a detailed programme had been developed to address this.
- The SIP Action Plan was a continual process and when received would incorporate feedback from Ofsted.
- It was suggested that it would be helpful if levels of assurance could be provided in the WSCB Annual report so that trends could easily be monitored.

The Panel was asked to advise the Cabinet Member of any data requirements/key performance indicators relating to safeguarding which it would be helpful to receive to assist them with identifying data trends, areas of improvement and where scrutiny was required.

The meeting ended at 2.45 pm

Chairman