

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Friday, 27 January 2017, County Hall, Worcester - 2.00 pm

Present:

Minutes

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

Also attended:

Mr M L Bayliss, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Mrs E A Eyre

Ms P A Hill

Mr M E Jenkins

Mrs E B Tucker

Mr P A Tuthill

Jane Stanley, Worcestershire Healthwatch

Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities), Tina Russell (Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care)), Steph Simcox (Head of Finance and Resources - Children's Services), Samantha Morris (Overview and Scrutiny Officer) and Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation slides: Children's Social Care: Service Improvement Plan (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 November 2016 (previously circulated).

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

262 Apologies and Welcome

No apologies were received.

263 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families declared an interest in that a member of his family worked for Children's Services.

264	Public Participation	None.
265	Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting	The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 November 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
266	Ofsted Inspection Feedback	<p>The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Children and Families, the Director of Children, Families and Communities, the Assistant Director (Safeguarding Services) and the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Financial Recovery attended the meeting to feed back to the Panel on the findings of the recent Ofsted Inspection.</p> <p>By way of introduction, the Director of Children, Families and Communities made a presentation to Members which included the following main points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Authority had last been inspected by Ofsted in 2010 under a very different inspection regime. In 2015 an LGA Peer Review, led by Gloucestershire County Council's Director of Children's Services, had been undertaken as a result of concerns identified following self-assessment. Following the Peer Review a Service Improvement Board had been set up and an improvement plan developed. • Since then, there had been significant financial investment in Children's Services – £11 million predominantly in placements – to provide sufficient resources for looked after children. A major challenge had been recruitment and retention of staff at all levels which had had a negative impact on the pace of change. • The unannounced inspection had lasted for 4 weeks. On the positive side, the inspectors had seen some very early signs of improvement. • It was noted that a number of the report's recommendations were not the sole responsibility of the County Council. Some would involve working with partners in health and the police to ensure a whole Worcestershire system response. • The new improvement plan was a development of the back to basics plan which had previously been considered by the Scrutiny Panel. The plan should be seen as evolution rather than revolution and took a whole system approach to service development. It was informed by the Ofsted

inspection and linked to the Corporate Plan and strategies developed by partners.

- The 8 point plan represented a very large programme of work. Each of the 8 outcome areas had 10-13 individual pieces of project work behind them. The detailed plan covered more than the 14 Ofsted recommendations.
- The responsibility for improvement went beyond Children's Social Care and beyond the Directorate of Children, Families and Communities. Responsibility lay with the whole organisation and partnership working would be critical.
- At a recent meeting with the Director, a senior inspector had indicated that he was impressed with the improvement plan and, in his experience, the County Council was further ahead than many local authorities were at this stage. A good start had been made.
- The Local Authority had 70 days to submit its improvement plan which gave a deadline of 3 May. However, on 22 February the Improvement Board would be asked to sign off the plan to be sent to Ofsted. Feedback so far on the work in progress had been positive.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions. The following main points were made:

- It was suggested that the Cabinet Members and Officers present at the meeting were not those who had presided over the deterioration of the service. The service had been rated as adequate in 2012 but this was no longer the case. It was suggested that, as Chair of the Service Improvement Board, the Chief Executive should have attended the Panel meeting to explain where things had gone wrong. The Health and Well-Being Board had set up a sub-committee for Children's Services, which had not met since June 2015. The previous Cabinet Member for Health and Well-being should also take responsibility for this and be held to account.
- Concern was expressed that the Corporate Parenting Board had not been able to investigate further when concerns were identified. The advice of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services was that the Corporate Parenting Board was not allowed to undertake scrutiny. Further concern was expressed about the engagement of District Council representatives on the Corporate Parenting Board. There was a need to put

pressure on District Councils to put forward Members who were prepared to do the job.

- Concern was expressed that, with all of the work required in response to the Ofsted report, the Director of Children, Families and Communities would not have sufficient time to give to her 'Communities' responsibilities. A question was asked as to whether the wider directorate was still appropriate.
- The CMR for Children and Families suggested that the Chief Executive could not be blamed for not attending the Scrutiny Panel meeting. The Panel was able to question the CMR, the Director and 2 members of the senior leadership team. There may be opportunities in the future for the Panel to speak to the Chief Executive who, he believed, had put a huge amount of time and energy into Children Services, making the issues a corporate priority. She had fronted the media response to the Ofsted Report and chairs the Service Improvement Board.
- The CMR reported that he had already seen improvements to the service since he had become Cabinet Member in May 2016. However, embedding improvements was like turning round an oil tanker and would require time. He suggested that, as an organisation, the Council needed to look at the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) and reconsider its structure and the connections with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Panel. He agreed that the District Councils should be asked to look again at their role on the CPB.
- The CMR informed the Panel that, in order to be inclusive and open, he would like to invite the lead spokespersons of opposition parties to join the Improvement Board. He was sorry that the report was not better than it was but the key thing was to move forward. He believed that the 8 point plan was the correct plan to put things right.
- The Director informed the Panel that she felt it was more important than ever for her to have responsibility for the broader remit including 'communities'. This gave an opportunity to look at what those other services could do to further support vulnerable children. For example, under a new initiative, care leavers would be automatically issued with a library card.
- The Directorate now had in place a talented Management Team, in particular the Assistant Director (Safeguarding Services). The Authority

had waited a long time to appoint the right person and the Director had absolute confidence in her. Progress had also been made on permanent leadership across the Directorate with 75% of group managers now being employed on a permanent basis.

- It was suggested that the report was not just disappointing, it was devastating. Children across the County had not been properly cared for and this would affect them for the rest of their lives.
- With reference to paragraph 108 of the report and the suggestion that the Scrutiny Panel had 'not offered sufficient challenge', a question was asked about why this was the case. The Panel had been robust and well supported and yet had still not been able to spot what was going on. It was suggested that this highlighted a need for further member training.
- Paragraph 105 referred to a wide-scale review of children in need cases that had taken place in June 2016, a time when both the CMR and the Director were in post. This had resulted in the closure of 65% of children in need cases, a review that now appeared to be fundamentally flawed. It would be important to get things right going forward and the people who were responsible for this review should stand up and be counted.
- The Director agreed that the review had not been helpful and she informed members that the people who were responsible were no longer working for the Authority. However, Worcestershire had had a large number of children in need cases which were open for a long time. An earlier criticism of the service had been in relation to drift and delay and needing to ensure the Authority was having a positive impact, something that was not happening for all children. It was right to review cases at that point and this had led to a decision to close cases. Work was now ongoing to review those cases that had been closed to ensure this had been the correct decision.
- In relation to the role of the Scrutiny Panel, the Cabinet Member reminded Members that there had been a number of recent signals that not all was well. These included his own report to Council and the Annual Report of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board, the Chairman of which had attended a Scrutiny Panel meeting.
- With reference to access to information, the CMR would wish all Members to have access to data

and suggested that challenge could only be helpful.

- The Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel advised Members that she felt the Panel had looked at the right issues, but there had been some slippage in reports coming back to the Panel. Members should take this opportunity to look at what could be done to improve scrutiny and what learning could be passed on to the new Scrutiny Panel.
- A Member suggested that Panel Members were often speaking to Officers who were too far removed from the coalface. It may be more useful for individual Members to visit officers and become closer to what is actually happening, carrying out more of an audit-type role.
- Another Member referred to the experiences of a family member who worked as a social worker and felt she had nowhere to 'whistleblow' when she had concerns. She suggested that workloads were quite frightening and were often far too much for one social worker.
- The Director acknowledged that children's social workers were doing the most difficult job in the Council and, nationally, they had come in for much unfair criticism. The national shortage of social workers had made it very difficult to recruit staff. The workforce was now a top priority. Whistleblowing was crucial in creating the culture of continuous improvement that the Council needed to become a learning organisation. It was important for the leadership team to understand what it was like for individual social workers. The role of the principal social worker would be important in this. Caseloads were variable with a current average of 19 per social worker. The volume of contacts received at the Family Front Door had gone up considerably, something that was an issue of concern. Many of the contacts were not appropriate but the team had to look at all of them. A fourth team had now been created to increase capacity at the FFD.
- The Council aimed to learn from other Authorities who had lost staff following a poor Ofsted report. Staff needed to be motivated and supported as part of an open culture. Negative media discussions would have an impact on staff.
- The Ofsted report criticised the Scrutiny Panel for not concentrating enough on children's safeguarding and being distracted by the proposed changes to Children's Centres. However, it was important to remember that the

Panel did not always have control of what was on its agenda as the OSPB also had a role in this.

- It was suggested that, as 'amateurs', the Panel needed simple management tools in order to make an assessment on whether the service was going in the right direction. In response, the Assistant Director (Safeguarding Services) suggested that, although performance indicators were important and were a useful indicator of what was happening on the front line, they did not always give the full picture. It would be possible to build a dashboard for the Panel, but it would be important to have different sources of information. The Directorate was undertaking a healthcheck survey of all social workers (The Voice of the Social Worker). Once finalised the report could be shared with the Panel. Reports were helpful but the physical experience of visiting social work offices would add another layer to the reports.
- The Director suggested that the new Council following the May elections was a great opportunity to re-set and be crystal clear about everyone's responsibilities.
- It was suggested that training on Corporate Parenting should be mandatory for all elected Members. Members were reminded that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services was currently arranging an information day for prospective candidates. The Director of Children, Families and Communities confirmed that she would be involved in this event.
- In response to a question about how the Improvement Board would feedback to scrutiny the CMR confirmed that the Board would now be meeting twice per month (increasing from once per month). In terms of PIs, the Board would be looking to identify the key metrics. He repeated his invitation for spokespersons of opposition groups to join the Improvement Board, something which would create a link between the Board and the Scrutiny Panel (as some Members would be common to both bodies).
- With reference to the refreshed Back to Basics plan, Members were advised that the focus was on good practice for social workers and this had become Workstream 2 on the 8 point plan.
- The Chairman asked if the Panel would be able to see the full 8 point plan before it was sent to Ofsted. The Director confirmed that the Improvement Plan did not need to be ratified by Ofsted, but they would undertake a monitoring

visit to ensure the plan was working for the children of Worcestershire. Any input from the Panel would need to be received before 22 February when the Improvement Board would sign off the Plan.

- The CMR suggested that the Scrutiny Panel may need to be more assertive in its requests for information and use the Scrutiny Team more to undertake research. He felt that openness, transparency and challenge were the best way to improve.
- It was confirmed that progress would be monitored by Ofsted at quarterly meetings. The Directorate would also be required to audit 6 cases per month and the Authority would be inspected again within 2 years. The Director was confident that progress had been made since October.
- A question was asked about the additional resources for Children's Safeguarding to be provided as part of the 2017/18 budget, how they will be spent and how the effectiveness will be measured. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Financial Recovery agreed that she would be able to bring these details back to the Panel once the budget had been agreed at full Council on 9 February.
- Concern was expressed about the treatment of the young people who had attended Council in January. With hindsight, the Key Issue Debate on Corporate Parenting should have been earlier on the agenda so that the young people were not required to wait for so long before being able to speak.
- In response to a question about the key surprises in the report, the Director informed the Panel that she had not been aware that the Authority was placing 18 year old care leavers in bed and breakfast accommodation. She agreed that this was not good enough and not what the Council would have wanted. Subsequently there had been a good discussion on this at Corporate Parenting Board but finding a solution would be tough and challenging. The CMR advised the Panel that he had been surprised by the breadth of the Ofsted Inspection as he had not expected it to reach into all areas, such as scrutiny arrangements. It had been a forensic investigation.
- A Member suggested that if problems were known about they should have been clearly expressed to

the Scrutiny Panel rather than expecting the Panel to pick up on hints. In response, the CMR advised that he felt he had been clear about the potential issues, pointing to his report to Council in June 2016 which had outlined the significant challenges, and the WSCB report which had been considered by the Scrutiny Panel in August 2016. The Scrutiny Panel had a huge remit and it would be for the Panel to decide how to do justice to this remit as it was a challenge to cover everything within the available time.

- Concern was expressed that notes of Directorate Briefings were no longer posted on the web for all Members to read. There were further concerns about attendance at Directorate Briefings and whether the flow of information was sufficient. The Director and Cabinet Member agreed to look into this, although it was acknowledged that information was often shared on an informal basis and some discussions may need to remain confidential.
- In response to a question about where a young person would turn in a crisis if they did not have a supportive family or school, the Director advised that this would depend on the circumstances. She acknowledged that young people's mental health was a growing challenge nationally and CAMHS was stretched. A new service had recently been commissioned which would offer support at a lower level than CAMHS. The effectiveness of this service would be evaluated over time.
- The Assistant Director (Safeguarding Services) advised Members that it was clear when she came to the role that there were a number of challenges. The solution would be very complex and it would be difficult to tackle everything at once. The amount of detail behind the 8 point plan was huge. She confirmed that she would be more than happy to facilitate a session for Members before 22 February giving them the detail behind the Improvement Plan. It was confirmed that there was a named lead and team for each aspect of the plan together with targets and measures.
- Newly qualified social workers were the easiest to recruit but they needed to have a support plan around them to further develop their skills. It remained difficult to recruit very experienced people as often, to progress in their careers, people had to leave the front line. However, the Directorate had had some success in moving from

agency workers to permanent posts.

- An analysis of Ofsted reports showed that Councils rated as 'Good' usually had a stable leadership team, a stable workforce and staff who felt valued and challenged, with manageable caseloads and listening, supportive managers.
- Although the Parent Governor Representatives and the Church Representatives were members of the Panel specifically for education matters, it was suggested that all of the Panel's workload could be related to education. It should be a priority after the local elections to get full membership from external organisations.
- A question was asked about whether schools were aware of the thresholds for social care intervention, in order to avoid the Family Front Door being overwhelmed. It was confirmed that training was provided for schools when the FFD was launched in July.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm

Chairman