

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 14 August 2017, County Hall, Worcester - 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present:

Mrs F M Oborski (Chairman), Mrs J A Potter (Vice Chairman), Ms P Agar, Mr R W Banks, Ms R L Dent, Ms P A Hill and Mr S M Mackay

Also attended:

Mr A C Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families
Mrs E B Tucker, Group Leader 2017 Group

Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities), Tina Russell (Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care)), Sheena Jones (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. Family Front Door Pathway (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 June 2017 (previously circulated).

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

279 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies received from members of the Panel were Mr B Allbut, Ms T Onslow, Ms S A Webb.

Derek Benson, Independent Chairman of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board had also sent apologies.

280 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

281 Public Participation

None.

282 Confirmation of

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 June 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**the Minutes of
the Previous
Meeting**

**283 Update on the
Children's
Social Care
Service
Improvement
Plan**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, the Director for Children, Families and Communities and the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) attended the meeting to provide an update on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

As Councillors were aware Ofsted's inspection of the County Council's Children's Services Report in January 2017 rated the services as 'inadequate' and highlighted 'widespread and serious failures'.

On 13 March 2017, prior to the local Elections, the previous Panel was provided with an update on the peer learning from other Local Authorities, an outline of the governance arrangements for the SIP and an early progress update.

Since the last update, a number of notable meetings/events had taken place directly relating to the SIP:

- On 30 March 2017, a small cohort of Looked after Children and Care Leavers took-over the Council's *Leadership Exchange* event. The session focused on Corporate Parenting responsibilities and was planned and delivered by Looked after Children and Care Leavers
- As a result of the session, a series of 'pledges' were identified to represent part of the Council officers' commitment to Corporate Parenting. The pledges were owned by the Wider Leadership Team, with support provided from across all Directorates within the Council. This represented the start of the journey to develop a culture that ensured children and young people were at the heart of everything. Progress would be reported to the children and young people on a regular basis
- In March, the DfE appointed Trevor Doughty (DCS at Cornwall Council) as the Children's Commissioner for Worcestershire. They asked him to advise on possible alternative delivery and governance arrangements for children's social care, outside of the operational control of the local authority, taking account of local circumstances

- and the views of the Council and key partners
- The Review took place over 2 weeks at the end of March and beginning of April and was submitted to the DfE by 9 June 2017. Unfortunately, the General Election on 8 June 2017 impacted on Ministerial appointments nationally, and the report had not been made public. It was expected to be published later this year. The review had set out concerns about the Authority's ability to make improvements
 - During April and June, a series of Partnership Locality Events were held across all six Districts, led by the Assistant Director: Safeguarding Services. A range of partner agencies attended to receive an overview of the challenges faced in helping to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and messages were tailored to address local context. These events would be held on a quarterly basis in the future to enhance children's practitioner networks between partner agencies and improve the quality of professional conversations, and to share best practice. A key theme for the events held between April and June was to raise awareness and understanding around the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) thresholds guidance document around levels of need. Ofsted reported that understanding and consistency of application was a key issue for the Local Authority and partners as a result of the inspection in October/November 2016.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Panel were concerned that the Children's Commissioners Review took place at the end of March and the Report was still not public. The Panel requested to look at the report on a confidential basis if necessary, but were advised by the DCS that this was not possible as it wasn't Worcestershire County Council's Report and it would be for the Minister of State for Children and Families to determine
- It was questioned why the Panel were unable to see the letter sent by Ofsted, which outlined the outcomes following their first monitoring visit on 23 and 24 May. The DCS advised that the DfE advice was that the letter from the first monitoring visit should not to be made public (including sharing with all councillors), but all subsequent

letters would be public

- A summary of the feedback, was however shared with the Panel:
 - Unfortunately, the feedback reported from Ofsted in May was not as the County Council would have liked. Despite Ofsted recognising some positives such as the political, corporate and leadership commitment to the improvement, most of the positives were qualified with a caveat. For example, Ofsted reported that social worker caseloads had reduced, but were still too high. Ofsted recognised that Community Social Workers were now better configured to support management of the demand at the Family Front Door, but there was still more that could be done
 - Ofsted also recognised the acceptable and detailed Improvement Plan, which was targeted on outcomes but challenged whether the focus was too broad based at the current point in the improvement journey
 - Ultimately, Ofsted deemed that the Local Authority was not yet making the expected progress to improve services for children and young people and cited that an absence of clear priorities was impeding its ability to make tangible and sustained change. Ofsted also reported that learning from audits was not being utilised to improve services and Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) thresholds were still not understood and/or being applied consistently.
- The next Ofsted monitoring visit (No. 2) was scheduled for 12/13 September 2017 and would again focus on the Family Front Door (FFD)
- Following the first Ofsted monitoring visit, which focused on the FFD and proposed final recommendations presented by the DfE Children's Commissioner on 9 June 2017, the improvement priorities had been re-focused. The four priorities were now:
 - Family Front Door – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessments
 - Remodel the Early Help Offer
 - Culture – Create a child-focused and accountable culture
 - Understand What 'Good' Looks Like
- The Ofsted feedback stated that although

progress had been made in respect of the issues relating to social worker caseloads and Community Social Workers, there was still more that could be done. The Panel were given examples of how this was being addressed, for instance the backlog of assessments had been reduced through temporary additional resources and there was now an online booking system for professionals to speak to Community Social Workers

- As of 31 July, there were 3 Initial Safeguarding Teams at the FFD, each consisting of 10 Social Workers per team (up from 8), which were aligned directly to 3 Safeguarding Locality Teams
- Reducing the backlog of assessments had resulted in reduced caseloads at the FFD significantly - with only 3/29 Social Workers having more than 20 allocations - average caseloads at the FFD were now 10 allocations per social worker
- The recruitment and retention of experienced Team Managers was a challenge, not just for Worcestershire, but nationally. Detailed analysis was being carried out to look at staff retention
- Reliance, turnover and dependency of agency staff also remained a challenge
- It was a priority to ensure that all staff, including partner agencies at FFD and Early Help understood revised levels of need guidance and ensure that they were being applied appropriately and consistently. There was also some work to be done to gain agreement and acceptance of the thresholds
- Working with the LSB was important for the re-modelling the Early Help offer to ensure that level 2 and 3 services were being delivered appropriately. Councillors made that point that it would be important for a parity of service across the districts as it appeared there was currently a postcode lottery
- A key date was the meeting of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board on 12 September 2017, when the accountability for the work on early help would be defined
- The work to re-establish Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements at FFD with agreed multi-agency protocol was to be completed during August
- In response to members' questions officers reported that support from the education sector remained a challenge

- In response to Councillor Potter's concern that there seemed to be lots of good things happening, but little progress and detailed timescales, The DCS referred to Appendix 2: Service Improvement Plan revised priorities (July – September 2017) which included actions and dates. Councillor Potter suggested that this format would be useful over a longer period say 1 year as a rolling document, so that it was clear what was being worked towards as well as the progress made
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility was clear that progress was being made but wanted to ensure that it was sustainable and that partners were also taking appropriate responsibility
- It was confirmed that currently the Authority were not able to take advantage of the Graduate Scheme for Social Workers because of the Ofsted 'inadequate' rating. Worcestershire had in the past been successful in appointing Social Workers through the Scheme.

It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with the following information requested:

- Details of who attended the Partnership Locality events held in April and June
- Outcomes in relation to the revised Service Improvement Plan submitted to Ofsted on 5 May 2017
- The KPI report on key performance areas reported to DCS and Leadership Team on a monthly basis.

In addition, consideration should be given to Panel carrying out some Scrutiny to look at the County Council's relationship with schools in terms of its support for Early Help.

284 Family Front Door

The Assistant Director - Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) explained to the Panel how Family Front Door (FFD) worked and copies of the FFD Pathway was circulated to the Panel. Members queried how non-professionals could understand the trigger points for different levels of service and the Director explained the threshold guidance used. It was a challenge to provide access to all 4 threshold levels of service in the community. In some cases partners did not have the resources to support the lower levels of access, which increased the risk of variable levels of service across the county. The Panel were advised that if they wished to visit the FFD, arrangements could be

| made for them to do so.

The meeting ended at 4.20 pm

Chairman