

## Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 24 October 2017, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am

### Present:

#### Minutes

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, Mr S M Mackay and Ms T L Onslow

### Also attended:

Bryan Allbut, Church of England  
Mr A C Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families  
Mr P Middlebrough  
Derek Benson, Independent Chairman, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Board  
Jane Stanley, Worcestershire Healthwatch

Tina Russell (Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care)), Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities), 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. Presentation handouts for Item 5: Update on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 September 2017 (previously circulated).

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

**290 Apologies and Welcome**

Apologies were received from Ms S A Webb.

**291 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

**292 Public Participation**

None.

**293 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**294 Update on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Children and Families, Director of Children, Families and Communities and the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) were in attendance for the discussion on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) which covered:

- The sequence of events since the Ofsted Inspection in October 2016 (and subsequent 'Inadequate' judgement of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board' in January 2017) to the present
- An update on the second monitoring visit from Ofsted on 12 and 13 September 2017 which focused on the Family Front Door (FFD)
- Key considerations moving forward.

Following the presentation, the Panel questioned and discussed the following areas:

- Why there had been a long timescale between agreeing the eight point SIP and being advised by Ofsted that it was too broad and needed to focus on a smaller set of key priorities. The Panel were advised that Ofsted thought that the eight point SIP was a comprehensive Plan of what services should look like but in May 2017, after the first monitoring visit Ofsted advised that that they weren't seeing tangible outcomes and so it would be advisable to pick some key issues to focus on. In response, the Member questioning on this area suggested that it would have been helpful if Ofsted could have advised that Plan was too broad earlier on in the process when they first had sight of it and the work to improve services could have had a more detailed focus earlier on
- The focus of the priority plan was:
  - FFD

- Early Help
- Culture
- Quality Assurance
- The Directorate were pleased that Ofsted had acknowledged in the feedback from the second monitoring visit that the Director of Children's Services and her Senior Team knew where services needed to be better and had the backing of the Chief Executive, wider Council and Political Leaders to tackle the challenges
- In response to the question about what % of the Children's Social Care staff were agency staff, the Panel were advised that 36% of staff were agency staff, which was still too high and that two of the localities had a better vacancy rate than the others. The point was also made that some agency staff were excellent and brought stability to the work force
- The role of the recently appointed Principal Social Worker was having a positive impact on the Service as he had worked in Worcestershire for a while and was a good experienced practitioner in a dedicated full time role meeting with staff and working on complaints
- Ofsted in their feedback had advised that the electronic performance systems to support managers at the FFD were still not fit for purpose. Although the developments required were in the work plan they needed to progress at pace. When questioned as to how this issue was progressing the Assistant Director advised that systems were now in place to ensure that the information was available in real time
- Some recent analysis of the reasons why staff were leaving the organisation revealed that although a couple of good staff had left Worcestershire County Council (WCC), in most cases it wasn't because they didn't like working for WCC and in fact staff were now saying that they felt supported by Team Managers. This was echoed by the team diagnostics being carried out by our Improvement Partner, Essex County Council. Staff recruitment and retention rates were not fluctuating significantly and in general, staff were positive
- The CMR further added that recruiting newly qualified social workers had its challenges as they didn't always want to work in child protection, caseloads needed to be managed and they weren't allowed to attend court
- In order to attract newly qualified social workers,

WCC linked with local universities but needed to expand this further

- The Assistant Director reminded the Panel that consideration of an Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) was in itself unsettling and would have an impact of the staffing situation
- Ofsted said that work to ensure that children who were at risk as a result of going missing was poor and that absent and late welfare return interviews was a cause for concern. In order to address this concern, the Assistant Director explained that WCC were working with the Police to see if there was any additional capacity that could be provided to improve the situation. The Panel were disappointed to see that performance in this area was declining and not complying with the statutory guidance. The Assistant Director explained that it was envisaged that there would be a decline in performance due to a change in practice. Previously, return home interviews were carried out at managers' discretion whereas now they were always offered to all children. It was acknowledged that this was an area requiring more focus. It was confirmed that the Police were providing WCC with relevant timely information
- In response to the question as to how many migrant and unaccompanied asylum seeking children were in Worcestershire and how many were missing, the Director advised that there were approximately 30 migrant and unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Worcestershire, 1 missing and 1 which couldn't be found
- 3 children had gone missing in Worcestershire in the last 12 months and 1 was missing for more than 72 hours, in fact 2 weeks
- Ofsted reported that a small number of cases that they had reviewed still had poor decision-making., The Panel were advised that the FFD Team Manager and Group Manager were carrying out case audits and where poor decision making was identified staff would be spoken to and managed accordingly
- There was a mixed picture about the number of children attending child protection case conferences. It was not promoted strongly enough and very social worker dependent. In order to improve the situation a template had been devised to ensure consistency
- Ofsted said that high quality managerial decision making was not yet consistent. The Panel were advised that there could be a variety of reasons

why. The decisions being made kept children safe, but some decisions could be the right decisions but poor quality which was more about the reasons behind the decision and whether they were being explained properly to all parties involved. The Director explained that out of the 25 cases that Ofsted looked at 5 weren't good enough

- In order to strengthen the 'voice of the child' there was now more of an emphasis on a child centred culture, in addition to exploring opportunities to support the involved adults
- WCC commissioned advocacy services from the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), which were available as required
- Ofsted had reported that services received by most children were better matched to their needs, supported by an improving application of the threshold for early help services. The improvements in this area needed to be supported by good quality universal early help, which was not totally co-ordinated yet, but there was a lot of good working with partners happening
- There had been recent, but significant, improvement in the attendance of health professionals at strategy discussions. When the reasons for poor attendance were analysed, some partners didn't think they were invited to these meetings, for some it was about the timeliness of the meetings as they were often at short notice. There was however now clarity about the expectation that health professionals attended these meetings, send a substitute or join the meeting online. The clarity and flexibility had improved the situation
- Members suggested that there needed to be stronger links with schools and more emphasis on awareness raising in terms of the process and understanding the thresholds. The Assistant Director explained that some partnership locality events had been run over the summer and had been well attended. A further programme of events would be arranged to which all partners including schools would be invited
- The Panel were provided with assurance that initial decisions relating to children's level of need were made within 24 hours. Either a social worker assessment would be made within 5 days if the issue was not safeguarding related, or a strategy discussion would take place on the same day if it was a safeguarding issue or the following day if

the child was in a place of safety and not at any immediate risk of harm eg hospital

- In order to evidence consent from Parents and Young People to referrals and information sharing, professionals were required to complete an online form unless it was a safeguarding issue
- Social worker assessments had improved and 90% were being completed on time
- The significant backlog of social work assessments had now been cleared and the work was now being managed on a week by week basis
- It was clarified that the areas of work which were not the current priorities of focus were contained in the Service Business Plan and reviewed every 12 months
- The Authority would be advised of the focus of the next quarterly inspection on 25 October
- Children's Services were commended on its progress to date, the Director was very grateful for the recognition because staff were working really hard to overcome difficulties; she felt that consistency of practice would come with staff stability. There was currently a 30% vacancy rate and the aim was for at least 85% staff permanency. Some improvements had been made to staff pay but this wasn't the only issue further work was yet to be done. Some of the reasons that staff were leaving WCC were to do with pay, high caseloads, good quality supervision and oversight and career development
- The Department was now looking to develop a programme which added value to practice, this was the 'Signs of Safety Model' which was a child focused and strength based model
- In January 2017, there was a significant delay in accessing educational psychology input to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and there was a backlog. This had now been cleared and all Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) were on target to be converted to an EHCP by March 2018.

The Panel requested:

- Data in respect of children missing from home, return home interviews split by WCC and the placing authority
- Data relating to the number of children missing in

Worcestershire.

The Chairman of the Panel thanked everyone for attending the Meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am

Chairman .....