

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 16 May 2018, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am

	Minutes
Present:	Mrs F M Oborski (Chairman), Mrs J A Potter (Vice Chairman), Ms P Agar, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Ms R L Dent, Mr P M McDonald, Mr S M Mackay and Ms T L Onslow
Also attended:	Mr M J Hart, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Education and Skills Mr A C Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families Mrs E B Tucker, Group Leader 2017 Group Nick Wilson, Interim Assistant Director - Education and Skills Tina Russell (Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Childrens Social Care)), Nick Wilson (Interim Assistant Director - Education and Skills), 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 Children's Social Care Service - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback and Special Education Needs/Disabilities Strategy (circulated at the Meeting) C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 March 2018 (previously circulated). (Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).
320 Apologies and Welcome	No apologies were received.
321 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip	None.
322 Public Participation	None.

323	Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting	The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 March 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
324	Children's Social Care Service - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback	<p>The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Assistant Director, Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) were invited to the meeting to provide an update on the outcome of Ofsted's fourth monitoring visit which took place on 18 and 19 April and focused on the progress of children in care, in particular placement stability and achieving permanence for young people aged over 16. Additionally, Ofsted reviewed the quality of practice in the Care Leaver's Service.</p> <p>The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care). The feedback from the Ofsted Inspection highlighted the following progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of support offered to children in care and care leavers had improved. • Corporate Parenting arrangements were now seen to be a strength and in fact had been recommended as good practice to other Local Authorities. Leaders had improved how they listened to children and relevant issues were now discussed at Corporate Parenting Board resulting in a positive impact e.g. Council Tax exemption. • A continued commitment to ensuring appropriate financial resources were available for Children's Services was enabling progress to be made. • Managers increasingly understood their services and this knowledge was starting to result in improvements in practice. • Children and young people were being listened to and staff knew their children well, which had been a major cultural change. • Staff welcomed the creation of the new Through Care Service and reported feeling secure and supported through change and were increasing in confidence. • Improved performance information was beginning to support learning and a culture of improvement. • Management oversight was evident in most cases. • Outreach was valued by young people and offered good quality intensive support to young people with complex needs.

- Evidence of effective partnership working with housing and positive transitions for young people who needed adult social care.
- The Virtual School Team had been more effective in supporting looked after children (LAC) in education and supporting social workers. Personal Education Plans were being used to provide extra support for young people eg extra tuition.

The areas for further progress and development were:

- Plans for children were not consistently good quality, lacking analysis, child focus and were not SMART.
- Transition planning for those leaving care started too late.
- A small number of children and young people continued to experience changes of worker.
- Management oversight was not sufficiently robust.
- Plans and reviews were not sufficiently detailed and good practice was not sufficiently referenced in documents.
- Dual pathway plans resulted in some duplication.
- Audits were too focussed on compliance and required greater moderation and reflection of the views of children and parents/carers.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following main points raised were:

- the Ofsted feedback letter referred to a **small** number of children and young people who were continuing to experience changes to social worker, in response to the question about how many 'small' was, in terms of actual numbers of children, the Panel was directed to slide 15 which showed the following detail:

No of Social Workers	No of Children
6	36
7	15
8	4
9	2

- 73% of social workers were now permanent, which was having the required stabilising effect on the workforce
- In response to the concern about the 12% LAC in

March 2018 who had 3 or more placements, the Panel was advised that this was not necessarily negative, for instance a child may have become looked after as an emergency, then placed with a foster carer and subsequently moved to a permanent placement. The biggest challenges faced in this area was reducing the number of emergency placements and enabling foster carers to manage risk

- In response to the question about whether Ofsted Inspectors talked to parents and carers (including birth families) when gathering evidence, the Panel was advised that generally the Inspectors would speak to foster carers but specifically for this monitoring visit they had not spoken to parents and carers
- Ofsted reported that following the restructuring of the services to create the Through Care Service, the Children in Care Team Managers received comprehensive and up-to-date performance information and that the improved performance information was beginning to support learning and a culture of improvement among some of the Through Care Service Management Team. At the time of the visit, the care leavers' dashboard was at an early stage of development and not yet providing the same level of understanding. It was however, confirmed that the care leavers' interactive dashboard was now complete and providing a depth of understanding to Management
- Ofsted's comment about Management oversight not being sufficiently robust, was referring to the need to clearly document on file as evidence, the reflective conversations that Managers were having about cases
- The Panel was advised that the reference to Social Workers knowing the children they worked with well but not documenting the information in sufficient detail on file was not as a result of lack of staff permanency in the relevant Teams as there was now stability in those Teams
- District Councils were going to be offered further training in respect of Corporate Parenting
- A small number of children's plans were written in the first person led by young people, this was a positive step forward and better reflected the young person's voice and perspective. Plans were now in place to try and increase this number further. It was suggested that the format of the Plans was important to ensure they didn't become

- a barrier to increasing the number of plans written in this way
- Although it was important to start transition planning for children leaving care, it was equally important to get the balance right to ensure that this type of planning didn't have a destabilising effect for children who had often had a traumatic start to life
 - The Panel was concerned that Ofsted had said that in terms of partnership working, health service involvement was not always sufficient for young people with additional health needs. There were known pressures around some services with high demand eg Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) but ideally all children should be access additional emotional support if needed
 - Further work was needed to ensure that caseloads were weighted and balanced so that social workers and personal advisers were able to meet the complex needs of some young people; the Panel was advised that this was not about needing more social workers but ensuring that the right service was being accessed at the right time.

325 Special Education Needs/Disabilities Strategy

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills and the Interim Assistant Director - Education and Skills were invited to the Meeting to discuss the Special Education Needs/Disabilities (SEND) Strategy, the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review and the feedback from the Joint Local Area SEND Inspection carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The Panel was advised that the feedback from the Joint Inspection had been made public that morning and copies of the feedback letter were circulated during the meeting.

The Panel received a presentation from the Interim Assistant Director - Education and Skills. He explained that the recent Inspection carried out by Ofsted and CQC covered the local area and looked at the provision in schools, health and council services. The Inspectors looked at how the local offer worked, the joint commissioning arrangements with the health service and the graduated response and assessment process.

Unfortunately, the Inspectors found that the 2014 SEND Reforms and Code of Practice had not been implemented properly, this was disappointing for everyone concerned but there was a strong commitment

to improve the Service. An Action Plan was being developed, focusing on the main areas of the local offer, joint commissioning arrangements and the graduated response. This, it was hoped would re-build the trust with parents and carers as the service improved.

The main findings from the Inspection were:

- the Leaders recognised that the local area had suffered from a lack of strategic direction in the past and the Director of Children's Services acknowledged that there was still much work to be done
- the Commissioner's strategic oversight of delivery was weak and required greater priority on the quality of services
- the local area had recently developed its SEND Strategy, but it was at an early stage of implementation
- the Strategy contained many of the requisite actions that underpinned a comprehensive and well-evidenced Strategy
- relationships with parent and carers were fragile
- the local offer was not fit for purpose
- Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans were not meeting timescales or of the quality required
- there was a strong commitment and drive from some professionals on the ground in education, health and social care to improve the quality of the local area provision
- Inspectors identified potential safeguarding concerns relating to the use of part-time timetables, children and young people being removed from school roll, and tracking vulnerable children
- Leaders recognised the benefits of strengthening accountability for improved outcomes and better use of resources across education, health and social care
- The determination of Leaders to ensure that the overall picture for children and young people who had SEN and/or disabilities improved was beginning to be recognised by professionals across the area
- Recent changes of Leadership were described as a 'breath of fresh air'.

During the discussion the following main points were made:

- the Action Plan agreed by all partners needed to be signed and submitted to Ofsted/CQC within 70 days
- one of the main findings of the feedback was that there was currently no designated Clinical Officer or designated Medical Officer in post and the provisional arrangements to fill the vacancy didn't reflect the breadth of the role sufficiently in terms of both strategic and operational duties. This had now been rectified and a Clinical Officer had recently been appointed
- although the conversion of all Statements of Special Education Needs to Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans met the statutory deadline of April 2018, the quality of EHC Plans was poor. Health and social care professionals were not actively involved in the assessment process and subsequent planning of support to meet children's and young people's needs. As a result, the child's or young person's health and social care needs were not being identified sufficiently well or being met effectively. Moving forward, it was important that the EHC Plans were more holistic.
- The Panel asked to be provided with the number of children who were on part-time timetables, being removed from school rolls and the number of vulnerable children housed in the local area by London boroughs. The Interim Director advised that collating this information was not straight forward but that an estimate could be provided
- The Panel was extremely concerned that the feedback had reported that there was a significant shortage in education provision in the local area for children and young people whose needs should be met in a specialist setting. Currently, 111 children were waiting to be allocated a place in a special school, and 25 children were not receiving education. The demand for specialist provision in the local area, when special schools were already full meant that some children and young people had to be educated out of County. As a result, additional financial demands were being made of the already overspent high needs funding budget. The Interim Director explained that there were plans to expand the Special School provision, but there had been many years of demand which had accumulated and built up. September 2018 would be tight in terms of school places, but every child that needed a special school space would be allocated one.
- The Panel were further advised that some children

who were currently in a specialist provision would now not meet the threshold for a specialist place but would go to a mainstream school with appropriate support.

It was agreed that the Panel should consider the draft Action Plan in July prior to it being submitted to Ofsted.

The Panel also requested that the Ofsted letter in addition to being sent to all relevant Headteachers and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO's), should be sent to the SEN Governor of all Governing Bodies.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

Chairman