

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Friday, 11 January 2019, 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 P M McDonald, Mr S J 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
Mr J H Smith, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Health and Wellbeing
Jane Stanley, Worcestershire Healthwatch
Mrs E B Tucker, Group Leader 2017 Group

Catherine Driscoll (Director of Children, Families and Communities),
Frances Howie (Director of Public Health)
Michael Hudson (Chief Financial Officer)
Liz Altay (Public Health Consultant)
Emma Brittain (Service Manager for FFD & Partnerships)
Susan New, Principal Accountant, Directorate of Adult Services, Directorate of Children and Families Financial Management
Chris Bird, Transformation and Development Finance Manager - Economy and Infrastructure, Commercial and Change Directorate and Chief Executive's Unit Finance
Samantha Morris (Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator)
Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2018 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

347 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Mr B Allbut, Mr R W Banks and Mrs R L Dent.

348 Declaration of

None.

**Interest and of
any Party Whip**

**349 Public
Participation**

None.

**350 Confirmation of
the Minutes of
the Previous
Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**351 Budget
Scrutiny: Draft
2019/20 Budget
Children and
Families**

As part of the Council's development of the 2019/20 budget, the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been asked to consider the 2019/20 draft budget, following a review of the 2018/19 budget position in November. The Cabinet Members with Responsibility (CMR) for Children and Families, and Education and Skills, the Director of Children, Families and Communities and the Chief Financial Officer had been invited to attend.

By way of introduction, the Chief Financial Officer made the following main points:

- The draft 2019/20 budget proposed a 3.99% increase in Council Tax Precept and overall there would be a £6.2 million net increase in cash. However, the budget would also see pressures from inflation and levels of demand. Diligence work and forecast modelling on demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and social care placements was ongoing.
- Members were reminded that no figures were yet available for school capital allocations beyond 2019/20.
- The Dedicated School Grant would be discussed by the Schools Forum in January and the outcome of these discussions would be reported to Cabinet.

The CMR for Education and Skills reminded the Panel that the budget for SEND included additional funding for staff and home to school transport. This was the second year of the new funding formula which had provided an extra £10.2 million overall, which he considered to be a step in the right direction.

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were made:

- In response to a question about whether the additional funding provided for the setting up of Worcestershire Children First (WCF) would be adequate, the Chief Financial Officer reminded Members that there was still a great deal of work to be done on the structure and financial needs of the new company. The company was due to launch on 1 October 2019, therefore the 2019/20 budget included provision for 6 months. Diligence work involving the Director of Children, Families and Communities, the Programme Team, the DfE and Mutual Venture would provide challenge and explore the experience of other authorities. Members were reassured that the financial situation would be subject to rigorous checks.
- As the service was improving, a question was asked about whether it was still necessary to set up a separate Company. In response, the CMR for Education and Skills recognised that the Company was being set up as a result of clear direction from the DfE. He acknowledged that, as the service improved, questions may be asked about how long it would need to be in existence. There were significant costs involved in setting up and running the company and he recognised that most Members would prefer to spend money on improving lives rather than on bureaucracy. The Director of Children, Families and Communities reassured the Panel that Officers and Members would be detailed and thorough in scrutinising how the additional resource was spent as they would want it to have a direct impact on the lives of the County's children. It was important to note that not all of the money would be spent on bureaucracy. For example, additional resource would be allocated to strengthening management, something which was driven by the improvement agenda.
- Members were informed that the KPIs for the new company would be set by Council. A question was asked about what would happen if the Company felt the allocated budget was not sufficient to meet the KPIs and asked for more money. The Director of Children, Families and Communities reminded Members that there was a clear message from the Council that extra investment was needed to drive service improvement and acknowledged that this was a difficult message to hear at a time of austerity.
- It was confirmed that the DfE had provided £3.15

million to cover set up costs. DfE funding was also available to cover the costs of the Chairman and the Non-Executive Directors for the period of time that the Council was 'in intervention'.

- It was confirmed that a number of posts would be added as a result of setting up the company. A list giving details of these additional posts would be circulated to Panel Members.
- Concern was expressed that by setting up a separate company, economies of scale were being lost. Members were reminded that it was a legal requirement for the company to have a Director of Finance and, although this was a 'doubled up' post, all other functions were the same as currently funded. Therefore, the loss of economy of scale was quite small.
- The CMR for Children and Families reminded the Panel that it was wrong to say the new Company had an open cheque book. However, there was a need to be realistic and recognise that it would not be easy to save money at the same time as improving the service. Worcestershire Children First would be a vehicle of the County Council. The Company would need to be efficient, but the pressures of the national context would remain.
- The Chief Financial Officer reminded Members that the Director of Children, Families and Communities would be producing the Company's Business Plan, something that she already did for Directorate. Planning and forecasting trends in placements would follow the same process with the Company. The Business and Financial Plan would be agreed by Cabinet in due course.
- Members were reminded that a specific earmarked reserve had been created for unforeseen demand in children's social care. There was strong financial planning for the unexpected and ongoing quarterly budget monitoring.
- It was confirmed that the service would not automatically come out of intervention when it was no longer judged to be inadequate. The Government would decide how long to leave the intervention in place. Members were reminded that the DfE would continue to fund certain posts as long as the Service was in intervention. It was suggested that it would be financially advantageous to the Council to bring the services back in house once the service was out of intervention.
- The experience of other Councils would suggest

that the improvement journey could take up to 5 years. Soundings from the Council's Commissioner suggested that the service was well in advance of where it would have been expected to be.

- A Member pointed out that the increased budget for Children's Services should be seen in the context of the Council's overall funding gap.
- Work was ongoing to establish a contract for the company and the contract term was currently expected to be 5 years. It was not the case that the company would be automatically collapsed if the service came out of intervention. The Council had chosen to work positively with the DfE on the development of the wholly owned company.
- With reference to the proposal to develop an edge of care service to reduce high numbers of looked after children (LAC) in expensive residential care placements, the Director of Children, Families and Communities reminded Members that the Council currently had no properly developed service to work with families at the moment of crisis (often referred to as the edge of care). Officers had been looking at the best practice in edge of care outreach in North Yorkshire and Essex. This would be targeted at adolescents, often in very challenging situations, and could be seen as 'late early intervention' for families in challenge and crisis.
- The decision to develop the edge of care service had followed visits to Essex and North Yorkshire Councils to test the evidence. Essex in particular provided a very compelling case. When in 2011 the Council had closed all of its children's homes, a third of the children had returned to their families and the number of children in residential care had gone down. There had also been a cultural shift in the workforce, with the focus being on the right care for the right children at the right time. The CMR Children and Families informed the Panel that the pressure behind the Essex move was not about money but instead about what was best for the young people.
- The Chief Financial Officer reminded Members that the Council had recently been successful in its bid to be one of the pilot authorities retaining 75% of its business rates, resulting in an additional £4.9 million. All 6 district councils had agreed that this should go to preventative services for children and adults. Further details on this would be given in the next Cabinet report.

- The development of the edge of care service was welcomed as it would give attention to the child and the family via intensive relationship-based therapeutic work, involving social workers, mental health practitioners, youth workers and other professionals.
- The service would also work with children who were missing from home or victims of child sexual exploitation or 'county lines' activity - children whose families were not abusive but were struggling to keep the young people safe.
- The full cost of the service was still being worked on but was likely to be in the region of £1 million. Resource would be re-directed from the money currently spent on children's homes. It was suggested that this did not seem a large sum of money for the service.
- It was confirmed that life story work was often done with children placed for adoption to record their life journey and experiences to support the development of a positive self-identity.
- Members were reminded that the top priority of the Service Improvement Plan was the workforce and the move away from use of agency staff. Good quality staff were key to improvement and stability of staff was important. The service currently had 79% stability of staff, a figure which was bucking the national trend. Children's social workers were very difficult to recruit and therefore a dedicated recruitment team was needed. The £97k spent on the recruitment team should be seen as an investment that saved money on expensive agency staff.
- With reference to the High Needs Gap, a Member suggested that schools were concerned that they were being asked to deal with children whose needs were hard to address. The CMR Education and Skills reported that this was a national problem with virtually every other upper tier authority having overspent in year. This needed to be tackled nationally with a greater funding base. There was additional money, but this was not enough to solve the problem. This would be discussed further at the Schools Forum.
- It was confirmed that an additional £675k had been included in the budget to fund 10 extra case worker posts to tackle the time lag on production of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- A question was asked about the future of the short breaks service for children with disabilities. It was confirmed that work was ongoing involving the

- Assistant Director and the Health and Care Trust.
- It was confirmed that the responsibility for Positive Activities for Young People had transferred to the Directorate of Public Health and there was no proposed reduction in funding. A statement on this would be included in the 31 January Cabinet report.
 - The Chairman of the Panel suggested that use of the specific earmarked reserve would partly depend on how quickly the edge of care service was seen to make a difference. In response to a question about when the service would be up and running, the Director of Children, Families and Communities informed the Panel that she would want to move as quickly as possible, subject to things being done correctly. She was confident that the service would be able to recruit staff and she had already received interest from staff who were keen to be involved. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that financial modelling for 2019/20 had assumed a start date for the service later in the year. A Member suggested that the Panel may wish to look at the edge of care service in more detail in due course.
 - With reference to the closure of children's homes, the Director confirmed that Officers were working with children and young people to ensure this was care plan led. In Worcestershire, 12% of LAC were in residential care. Although this figure was too high, it was confirmed that residential care would still be the appropriate option for some children, in particular those who needed more intensive support. It was confirmed that this might be provided through specialist private homes, as was currently the case.
 - The Director suggested that the Panel may wish to have a discussion at a future meeting on sufficiency work being undertaken by the Directorate, including private residential provision used by the Council.
 - A question was asked about whether the Directorate was expecting an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Chief Financial Officer responded that, although an increase was not expected, the earmarked reserves were in the budget to cover any such eventuality.
 - The Chairman of the Panel reminded Members that some London Boroughs were choosing to take families in Worcestershire to take advantage of lower housing costs. She went on to

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express concern that the children and young people from these families may create a demand on services in the County.

Following the meeting, the Panel's comments would be summarised and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 24 January.

The Chairman of the Panel had requested performance monitoring data for children's social care and the Panel had been provided with a data set for 2018/19 Q2.

The agenda item was introduced by the Service Manager for FFD and Partnerships. During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Family Front Door (FFD) had seen an increase in the number of referrals. However, the service was continuing to work on the correct application of thresholds to ensure the right referrals for the right children and there had been positive engagement in multi-agency strategy discussions.
- A number of new permanent managers had been appointed and there had been an improvement in the timeliness and quality of assessments. 80% were now completed within 45 days. In response to a question about why the number of assessments taking more than 45 days had increased from 13% to 19%, Members were informed that this covered a period which had seen a higher than usual level of staff holiday.
- In response to a question about the impact of staff starting assessments and then leaving the Council, the Director of Children, Families and Communities reminded the Panel that a stable workforce was key.
- A Member noted that the FFD had seen the largest number of referrals in July and 75% of these had been signposted to universal services. He went on to question whether this indicated a problem with over-referral and asked whether training was available for schools to ensure appropriate referrals. The Service Manager confirmed that analysis of the referrals received had revealed a feeling from schools that, if in doubt, they should refer. This situation was getting better but she acknowledged that the service still received some inappropriate referrals. She confirmed that the service was working with the Safeguarding Adviser – Education to build

confidence in schools and schools were responding positively to this.

- It was suggested that year on year figures would be helpful to allow the Panel to identify trends.
- The Panel was advised that there was a reduction in the number of repeat child protection plans as a result of much clearer social work practice.
- It was confirmed that LAC were no longer included on the Child Protection Register.
- With reference to Children in Need, a question was asked about how the figure of 49 per 10,000 compared with similar authorities. Although the Service Manager did not have the figures to hand, she agreed to get back to Panel Members following the meeting.
- The Panel was told that the Authority now employed 3 Missing Children Officers who undertook return interviews and compiled critical data about age groups, hot spots, and push and pull factors. It was confirmed that the Council did not currently have any cases of young unaccompanied asylum seekers who had gone missing. The Panel Chairman felt this was very positive and should be seen as real evidence of success. The Service Manager welcomed the fact that more young people were willing to be engaged and the voice of young people was being heard, suggesting that this could feed in to the edge of care service.
- It was confirmed that the majority of missing children were not previously known to social care. If they went missing repeatedly they would be referred to social care.
- Members were reminded that the figures for missing children also included boys who had become involved in 'County Lines' activity. The Chairman asked that statistics relating to County Lines split by district council area be provided.
- With reference to Looked After Children, the service had seen a reduction in the number of very young children being taken into care.
- The Chairman requested information on the number of repeat section 20 cases in the County (ie cases where a parent requested that a child was looked after by the Local Authority). The Service Manager agreed to look into this.
- The Chairman went on to request information on the reasons why children were taken into care, if available.
- The Panel welcomed the improvement in the

353 Commissioning a Prevention and Early Intervention Service for Children and Young People

number of children attending Looked After Child reviews. The Service Manager confirmed that this was a key area in the Service Improvement Plan and hoped that capturing the voice of the child would influence practice going forward.

- With reference to the number of children experiencing 3 or more placements, it was difficult for Panel Members to be clear whether the figures were improving without seeing historic data. The Director reassured Members that the numbers were improving.
- A Member reported that she had recently attended a safeguarding fair and had been impressed by the social workers she had met. The Chairman of the Panel had also been impressed by social workers showing commitment to the Authority and their engagement with young people. She reminded Members that a young person's relationship with their social worker was often the key to success in future life.

The Cabinet Members with Responsibility (CMR) for Health and Well-being, and Children and Families and the Director of Public Health had been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on the 13 December 2018 Cabinet decision in respect of Commissioning a Prevention and Early Intervention Service for Children and Young People.

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Director of Public Health reminded Members that it had previously been expected that a new contract would run from April 2019. As no bids had been received, a contract variation period had been arranged.
- The service was provided in a rapidly changing environment in the context of the Ofsted inspection and service improvement plan, and the SEND inspection.
- It was confirmed that services were mainly delivered by health visitors and school nurses and included level 1 services, such as parenting programmes. Level 1 and 2 early help services were provided by 10:32 Barnado's in Wyre Forest, by Action for Children in south Worcestershire and by Redditch Borough Council in Redditch and Bromsgrove. It was confirmed that regular quality assurance and monitoring via an integrated

service dashboard ensured that there was service equivalence across the 3 providers.

- In response to a question about the use of volunteers, Members were reminded that this related to the concept of community parenting and equipping people to help others by developing peer support networks. There was solid evidence that peer support worked.
- The parental support programme was a 12 week programme which provided practical support.
- It was confirmed that the timetable for changes was predicated on reducing the risk of disruption, ensuring sufficient time for transition and no 'sharp edges'. Members were reassured that there would be complete continuity with the previous specification. It was confirmed that one of the drivers behind the move to an integrated service was to avoid duplication of service provision.
- The Director of Public Health suggested that it would be helpful for her to attend a future Panel meeting to give a further update on service developments.
- The representative from Healthwatch asked how the service intended to target specific hard to reach groups. In response, Members were reminded that this was a universal service in the first instance with all families having access to health visitors and midwives antenatally. This initial contact would allow professionals to identify levels of risk.
- A Member from outside the Panel suggested that by calling this the 'early intervention service' it had a very similar name to social care 'early help' and this created potential for confusion.

It was agreed that a further update would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

354 Work Programme 2018/19

This item was not discussed.

The meeting ended at 12.23 pm

Chairman