

## **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Friday, 14 September 2018, County Hall, Worcester - 2.00 pm**

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|                       |  | <b>Minutes</b>  |
| <b>Present:</b>       |  | Mrs J A Potter (Vice Chairman), Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Ms R L Dent, Mr P M McDonald, Mr S J Mackay and Ms T L Onslow   |
| <b>Also attended:</b> |  | Andy Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families<br>Derek Benson, Independent Chairman, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board<br>Sue Haddon, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board Business Manager<br>Tina Russell (Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care))<br>Sarah Wilkins (Interim Assistant Director for Early Help and Commissioning)<br>Debbie Herbert (Lead Commissioner)<br>Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and<br>Alyson Grice (Overview and Scrutiny Officer) |
| <b>332</b>            | <b>Apologies and Welcome</b>                               | Apologies were received from Ms P Agar, Mr B Allbut and Mrs F M Oborski. Members were informed that, as the Chairman had given apologies, the meeting would be chaired by the Vice Chairman, Mrs J A Potter.<br><br>To accommodate Officers' availability, the Chairman agreed to alter the order of the agenda items. Items 6 and 7 would be taken first, followed by item 5 and then item 8.  |
| <b>333</b>            | <b>Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip</b>       | None.   |
| <b>334</b>            | <b>Public Participation</b>                                | None.   |
| <b>335</b>            | <b>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting</b> | The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 August 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.  |

**336 Children's Social Care Service - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) had been invited to provide an update on the outcome of Ofsted's fifth monitoring visit which had taken place on 11 and 12 July 2018.

The Assistant Director provided Members with a presentation. The following main points were made:

- The outcome of the visit was a continuation of the positive trajectory of previous monitoring visits. The service was making positive progress but there was still more to do.
- There remained a need to establish a consistent quality of service to all children in all parts of the service. This would require the recruitment and retention of good quality social workers.
- The aim was to ensure sustained improvement. It was acknowledged that there was no quick fix.
- The service aimed to achieve a life-long positive impact and decisions needed to be the right ones for now and for the long term.
- The July visit had confirmed a growing stability in the workforce with successful recruitment and reduced staff turnover. Social worker morale was improving with staff feeling challenged and supported.
- Increased staff stability meant that 74% of children now had had 3 social workers or less. This was a positive statistic. In relation to agency staff, the service was running at 61% permanency. Ofsted had reported that the revised operating structure was working well, with each manager having oversight of approximately 100 cases, allowing for more regular supervision. It was important that this was reflective supervision as well as decision making.
- 'Signs of safety' (the new model for working with children and families) was also being used as the model for social worker supervision. Although this model was being used more widely by social workers, there was still a degree of inconsistency in how it was being recorded.
- Ofsted had noted an overall increase in social workers' confidence and highlighted that assessments that had commenced in the last eight months were consistently of good quality. Of the six social work teams, five now had a permanent manager.
- A programme of training for partner agencies on

'Signs of Safety' had just commenced. This would include schools, the health service and staff in targeted early help.

- The importance of finding time to reflect was emphasised. This was hard to do but it was important that it became part of core business.
- The next Ofsted monitoring visit would take place on 2 and 3 October and would focus on children in care.

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

- In response to a question about the reasons for 'drift and delay' as referred to in the Ofsted letter, Members were reminded that a change of social worker might cause a case to drift as a new social worker would take time to pick up the work and build a relationship with the child and family. Also, social workers had to deal with competing priorities. For example, if a social worker was required to respond to a child protection emergency, it may mean a child in need visit would have to be cancelled.
- Reduced caseloads would help reduce drift and delay. The target was for social workers to have an average of 16 cases, whereas the current average was 17. However, it was suggested that averages often disguised differences between staff. ASYE staff (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) may only have 12 cases whereas more experienced staff may have 20 or 21 cases. Caseloads had reduced consistently but were not yet at the right level for all. In best practice authorities, caseloads may be at the level of 6 to 8 but this was not achievable in Worcestershire. Good outcomes for children were the absolute priority but this was not achievable without workforce stability.
- A Member congratulated staff on the positive feedback and noted the progress made. However, she queried the use of imprecise language in the Ofsted letter such as the word 'some' and 'significant work'. The Assistant Director agreed, and highlighted the lack of clarity around the word 'consistent'. There was not one area that had been highlighted as an area of real concern.
- The Cabinet Member reminded the Panel that the strengths based model aimed to focus on what someone could do rather than what they could not

do. He suggested that at the start of the process there were concerns at every level. However, the service had now moved past this and was focussed on the operational level rather than the strategic.

- In response to a question about why the Ofsted letter referred to the new approach being 'received favourably by some social workers', it was explained that at that point not all social workers had received training or were confident in using it. No social workers were resistant to the approach and a network of 90 champions was providing further support to ensure social workers were confident beyond the training.
- A question was asked about how the new assessment approach had impacted on social worker workloads and whether children and families had an input into what was decided as the way forward. Although children and families were asked what was going well and what was not going well, the correct pathway was a matter for the social worker's professional judgement, with decisions being made in conjunction with the family and other partner professionals.
- A question was asked about whether partners had bought in to the new culture and ways of working. The Signs of Safety model was about risk management and when working in a highly pressurised environment, people were often worried about making the wrong decision. One way of managing this anxiety was to refer the case to a social worker. However, not all cases would need a referral to a social worker. There was a need to reassure partners that they could manage this risk themselves. The 'danger statement' (part of the Signs of Safety model) aimed to get the professionals involved to put the risk factors into proportion.
- Staff needed to have confidence and the support of managers who would support their decision making. There was a need to recognise that when something went wrong, it was not always someone's fault.
- It was suggested that the heavily publicised 'inadequate' judgement had caused professionals to be risk averse and had increased demand for safeguarding services. Increasing social workers' confidence was key.

## 337 Performance Monitoring

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families and the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) attended the meeting to present performance monitoring data for children's social care 2018/19 Q1.

Members were invited to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- It would be helpful to have figures for previous years to allow identification of trends. It was confirmed that this would be provided for future reports.
- Members were informed that, where national comparator information was available, it was provided in the report.
- Concern was expressed that the newly appointed Missing Children Officers were only responsible for conducting welfare return interviews with children placed by Worcestershire County Council. Children placed in Worcestershire by other local authorities remained the responsibility of the placing authority. Historically, the likelihood of a child running away was higher if a child was placed out of area. Members were informed that the Fire Service had offered to help with welfare return interviews.
- In response to a question about how the work of the Missing Children Officers would be monitored, Members were informed that this would be qualitative and quantitative. Not all children and young people would want to engage in the process but better consistency of practice from officers would mean more children were likely to engage. This engagement was key to preventing repeated episodes.
- In response to a question about the number of LAC children experiencing multiple placements, Members were told about the importance of preventing placements breaking down. Further training and support was being provided for foster carers with the aim of reducing placement breakdown.
- It was confirmed that the Council did place LAC children in boarding schools and private schools, although no children were currently placed in such schools.
- Members were reminded that, although Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remained a serious risk, the remit of the CSE Strategy Steering Group (a sub group of the WSCB) was being extended to

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Safeguarding  
Children Board  
Annual Report  
2017-18**

include other forms of exploitation such as gangs, drug dealing (County Lines), forced marriage and trafficking.

The Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) and the WSCB Business Manager had been invited to present the Board's Annual Report 2017/18.

By way of introduction, the Independent Chair made the following main points:

- He reminded the Panel that last year's annual report had been less than positive but had reiterated the commitment to partnership working.
- Although this year's report was more positive, there remained a gap and work was ongoing to improve further. The drafting of the neglect strategy (which would come to the WSCB in December 2018) was a positive development as was work with partners looking at domestic abuse and sexual violence from a children's safeguarding perspective.
- Child Sexual Exploitation remained a priority but the WSCB was also looking beyond CSE to the wider context of adolescent safeguarding, including drugs, County Lines and other violence. Superintendent Damian Pettit was leading this work.
- Members were informed that, collectively, Early Help remained an issue although lots of improvement work was being undertaken. The dissemination of information to professionals was key.
- It was important to ensure that the voices of young people were heard so that professionals were aware of the lived experience.
- The WSCB would continue to act as a critical friend in relation to the Service Improvement Plan.
- He confirmed that the WSCB budget had been underspent at the end of the last financial year, the result of one post remaining unfilled and a greater return than expected on a training project. The Board was talking to partners about how to use this money and was keen to ensure that public money was not wasted.
- From September 2019, the WSCB would no longer exist. Partners (including the local authority, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and the police) were now working to design new arrangements. It was anticipated that the new

arrangements would be evolutionary rather than revolutionary and the direction of travel would be to take the best of the current arrangements while working more closely with the Safeguarding Adults Board.

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

- In response to a question about whether information sharing was still a problem, Members were informed that although things had improved there was still room for further improvement. The introduction of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) had caused some people to step back. Although it was acknowledged that partners needed to be legally compliant, the Board wanted to foster an ethos of 'dare to share' if it was in the interests of the child.
- It was confirmed that, although the situation had improved since the Board's last report and safeguarding was in a better place than last year, there was still a way to go.
- With reference to CSE, the agenda report referred to the absence of an up to date multi-agency CSE Problem Profile. It was confirmed that this work was now much further forward with an interim profile having been produced.
- The Panel was informed that work was ongoing to develop better communication between schools and early help. With reference to targeted family support, it was important that partners understood what an appropriate referral was and developed a greater willingness to pick up responsibility without automatically looking to refer. There was still further work to be done, and training and awareness-raising was ongoing, with the aim of reducing the number of inappropriate referrals to the Family Front Door.
- The Board continued to undertake multi-agency case file audits and although inappropriate referrals were still received, there was also a huge amount of work being undertaken to refine the systems. The Board aimed to support communications initiatives via practitioner network meetings, the education safeguarding adviser to schools, newsletters, e-communications and training.
- It was confirmed that the 25 Child Death Notifications included all child deaths in Worcestershire in the year covered. This was the

lowest number since 2006. The modifiable factors which were present in 11 of the deaths referred to cases where it was felt something could have been done to prevent the death.

- Members were interested in the local secondary school referred to in the report, which had undertaken work to support students who might be aware of another child's suicidal thoughts or behaviours. This school had done some impressive work to develop a process to allow other young people to report their concerns. Discussions were ongoing about wider dissemination of this work to other Worcestershire schools.
- It was confirmed that the 25 Child Death Notifications received during the year were not necessarily the same children as the 25 reviewed by the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) as there was a time delay in cases coming before the CDOP.
- A question was asked about whether the review of children's safeguarding arrangements would provide an opportunity for more joined-up working with the Adult Safeguarding Board, particularly with reference to transitions and looking at the whole family. The Independent Chair replied that it was an absolute imperative for the 2 Boards to work together. Transition was a time of particular vulnerability and should be made seamless, with social workers being encouraged to 'Think Family'. It was suggested that adolescence did not end at 18 but could extend to 24.
- It was confirmed that, although there was no physical service user presence on the WSCB, the Board undertook lots of engagement with young people. It was suggested that former service users who were now adults could have a place on the Board in the future. Members were informed that sub groups in relation to particular issues, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and suicide prevention, had included former service users.
- With reference to the unfilled post, a question was asked about how this had impacted on the effectiveness of the Board. Members were informed that a colleague being on long-term sick leave had increased the pressure on other officers to deliver training programmes. This had been taken forward in as cost effective a way as possible, using consultants and sessional trainers. Multi-agency training continued and all courses



**339      Update on the  
Use of  
Children's  
Centre  
Buildings**

were delivered as planned, due to the hard work of the Business Manager and the Business Unit.

The Chairman thanked the guests for attending.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Assistant Director for Early Help and Commissioning had been invited to update the Panel on the use of Children's Centre buildings and the related delivery of early childhood and early help services.

By way of introduction, the following main points were made:

- The appendix to the agenda report gave details of services currently delivered in each centre. This was a live working document.
- The report outlined recent changes to Children's Centres in the context of Government policy and national research.
- The Council's Early Years Strategy was currently being reviewed and this work was being led by the Assistant Director Education and Skills.
- Nationally and locally, resourcing levels for Children's Centres had reduced.
- Footfall in Children's Centres had also reduced both nationally and in Worcestershire. However, some centres had seen an increase in footfall. The recording of footfall was difficult and had changed as the operation had transferred to other providers. Footfall was recorded while the service was under the Ofsted regime but there was no longer the resource available to do so in the same way.
- Between 2016 and 2017 there had been a 45% reduction in the number of children attending Children's Centres in the County. However, since 2012 there had been a dramatic increase in the number of children attending early education and childcare. Children's Centres were being used by health and maternity services and support for families as part of the early help offer.

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

- In response to a question about how the impact of the centres was measured, Members were informed that for those centres run by commissioned providers this was outcome based. In Worcestershire, children's level of development

at the end of the foundation stage was above average. However, for more disadvantaged children, it was slightly below average. Children's Centres contributed to the level of development and there was a need to ensure that the provision at Children's Centres added value.

- A question was asked about the long-term strategy for Children's Centres. The Panel was told that earlier this year Ministers had linked funding of Children's Centres to the early years mobility strategy. There had been massive investment in the Centres between 2001 and 2010. Following this, Government policy changed with an increase in early education and childcare but a reduction in funding. The buildings were used for health and community projects as well as for education. It was heartening to look at the Early Years Strategy which aimed to use the buildings and facilities to achieve the best for children in the County.
- A short video had been produced to illustrate the work undertaken at Children's Centres in the County. This would be circulated Panel Members following the meeting. It was suggested that the video could be shown at a future meeting of full Council. Democratic Services Officers were asked to look into this.

The meeting ended at 4.02 pm

Chairman .....