

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 17 January 2019 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Chris Coleman	Cllr Shaun Parsons
Cllr Stephen Davies	Cllr Brian Robinson (Chairman)
Cllr Colin Hay	Cllr Lesley Williams MBE
Cllr Dr Andrew Miller	

Apologies: Charlotte Blanch, Dr Richard Castle, Cllr Loraine Vivienne Patrick and Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Brian Robinson declared a personal interest as a Foster Carer.

The Chairperson on behalf of the Committee wished to pay his respect to Councillor Jack Williams who sadly passed away. Councillor Coleman, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats added that Councillor Williams was a well-respected and hardworking member for Churchdown and volunteered working with many young people in his ward. It was noted that he was also a well-liked and respected member of this Council and the Committee reflected on his work.

Cllr Coleman explained that Cllr Williams was largely responsible for the Liberal Democrats decision to work on the Ofsted outcome and was a driving factor in working to improve the CYP services in Gloucestershire. He actively met frontline staff and was a proactive Member of the Scrutiny Committee. Cllr Coleman expressed his deepest sorrow for Cllr Williams family.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting on the Thursday 21st November 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Committee were given an update on the outstanding actions:

- It was agreed that the MASH invitation would be recirculated to members of the Committee, individual members would be responsible for contacting officers directly to make the necessary arrangements. **Action – Andrea Griffiths**

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- The DCS explained that the third party review completed by the LGA and People Too, had been completed and a copy of the report would be circulated to Members in due course. It was agreed that the report would also be included for discussion at the next committee meeting. **Action – DCS/Andrea Griffiths**
- In relation to the Children & Young People Mental Health Services, the DCS advised the committee that the CCG weren't aware of the grant that was previously available. However, Health had now submitted a bid for £5million, over two years to set up CYP Mental Health Support Teams across the County in schools. The Committee welcomed this approach and requested that this item be included on the Committee's work plan, Committee also felt it would be beneficial to have sight of the bid before it was rolled out to schools. **Action – DCS/Andrea Griffiths**

3. IMPROVEMENT BOARD UPDATE

The Committee welcomed Andrew Ireland, Independent Chair of the Improvement Board to the meeting. Mr Ireland reported on the work of the Board, his role as Chair and the cross partnership aspects involved in the work. In addition, he reflected upon developments made within the service and the performance improvements. He proceeded to highlight the critical areas where progress was still required in order to secure the sustainable improvements.

The Chair of the Improvement Board explained that the council had decided to continue with the Improvement Board and had contracted his services to continue the function. He advised the Committee that he had been assisted fully in his role and the Council had been true its word. It was noted that his role gave him the freedom to meet regularly with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and other senior management as and when he required. Members were informed that as the Chairperson, Mr Ireland also had the opportunity to visit staff and teams on the ground, in order to formulate his own assessment and opinion of daily practice. Primarily, he had ability to challenge the Council and others where insufficient progress had been made or over specific aspects of performance.

The DCS explained that it was not a case of aiming to scrape over the Ofsted line, the aim was to produce the best service possible for the young people in Gloucestershire. The Committee were reminded that there was a bigger picture to keep in mind, and the Improvement Board would help to focus attentions on long term improvements.

The key issues were detailed in the report, the Chair of the Improvement Board informed the Committee that there was a clear positive trajectory and the report showed an improvement. He added that there was still some way to go in some areas and there would undoubtedly be some bumps along the way, however the trajectory was looking positive.

Members noted that the Board had reflected some strong levels of concern but were intent on moving forward. As such, the Chair of the Improvement Board had

visited MASH, and felt there were strong processes in place, and he was confident they would continue to pick up and improve on the arrangements in place. It was noted that this was the single most important aspect as this set the tone for the business as a whole.

In response to a question, it was explained that the Improvement Board had reflected some strong levels of concern but were pleased to report things were moving forward. As a point of information, Improvement Plans were presented to the Board on a regular basis.

The Committee were reassured that the Chair of the Improvement Board had visited staff county wide, he felt confident in their approach, which would make a significant difference to the service. It was reported where strong and committed management teams were in place this notably had an impact on staff morale.

The Chair of the Improvement Board explained that the Board were making a valid contribution to the process and were gaining an insight into multiagency partnerships. They were also intent on narrowing down the focus, in order to gain traction and acceleration. It was evident that it was necessary to get good driven interim managers on to permanent contracts, as they were a driving force behind making key differences to the service.

In response to a question, it was noted that management had a strong understanding of managing performance, which was proven to be embedded within the staff group and was evident in the Districts. Members were advised that some agency staff were inspirational leaders and encouraged their teams to achieve and deliver the best service possible, which in turn was reciprocated by staff on the ground. It was evident that some agency staff were on short term contracts, which highlighted where the difficulties occurred. The high level of staff turnover in Gloucestershire was a problem to overcome and with the help of energetic and enthusiastic managers it could prove to be a positive experience and employees would want to remain in service.

Officers explained that induction and exit interviews in the past hadn't always been reported as a positive experience, however human resources were actively working to improve the induction and exit processes. It was deemed a valuable learning tool, especially from those who were exiting the service as lessons could be learnt.

Members were advised that 75% of team managers were now employed on permanent contracts and the aim was to increase this figure in order to stabilise and improve staff morale and confidence in the service area. It was reported that in the Forest of Dean, there were now 3 permanent team managers and 1 agency team manager and these individuals were making a rapid difference to the team and service delivery.

The DCS informed members that all staff were offered an exit interview, even with the DCS if they wished, however the choice was up to the individual. It was noted that the DCS had conducted two exit interviews to date, Members welcomed this approach.

In response to a question in terms of grass roots and partnership working, the Chair of the Improvement Board explained that there were performance indicators for children in care, and the board actively monitored and pursued these areas if they weren't progressing in the right direction. The Committee concurred that multi agency strong working partnerships would be the key part of success for the Improvement Board and the performance framework would evidently judge how it was working.

Members were advised that the Board were encouraged to see progress being made, however there was still a need for consistency across the Authority.

Resolved

That the update be received.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK: PROGRESS UPDATE REPORT

The Head of Quality Children and Families, Rob England presented the report in detail. The report provided an overview of the audit activity undertaken in December, including the completion of audits against expectation, the growth in the number of auditors through the rolling training programme and other quality assurance activity. The Committee welcomed the report and appreciated having sight of the latest figures.

The Head of Quality Children and Families informed the committee that the data showed that 23% of cases audited were rated as inadequate. The Committee accepted that in order for the organisation to be lifted from an overall rating of inadequate, it was necessary to move the monthly audit ratings to no more than 10% inadequate. There were significant improvements in the audit completion rates as a result of considerable oversight and any exemptions had to be approved by the Director of Children's Safeguarding. The Committee agreed that the pressure needed to be maintained until audit process was seen as business as usual.

It was reported that the service had achieved its target of having 85 trained auditors in place by the end of November 2018, though 3 had left GCC in December and 3 had become moderators. This represented continued growth in the auditor and moderator capacity, in addition a small group of internal trainers would be trained in February 2019, who would take forward the delivery of the auditor and moderator development on a rolling quarterly programme. This would enable the service to sustain a good level of auditor capacity going forward.

The Head of Quality Children and Families reported that risk assessment appeared to be an improving area, of which 30% were judged good. However, it was noted that weaknesses in Risk Assessment remained a dominant feature in the inadequate practices of 25%, this would remain an area of priority focus. It was explained that it would be necessary to spend time with managers in order to

develop an understanding of the situation, whilst attending to audits in a timely manner.

In response to a question, members were advised that it was not a one size fits all approach, as there was evidently something which prevented managers from discharging their duties and the Head of Quality Children and Families was keen to understand why.

The Committee were advised that the analysed data was discussed with the appropriate teams as a learning tool which proved beneficial to all concerned. In addition, the audit results were discussed with the leadership team and cascaded down to enforce the learning experience. However, it was evident that not all parties acted on the information.

The DCS remarked that until a year ago, there was an unreliable audit process in place and now there were 82 trained auditors. Members were advised that ex-senior Ofsted inspectors had been involved in the training of the auditors and moderators, and as a prescriptive process imposed on staff the service had developed considerably. It was evident that the service was now being audited against a 'good' standard and managers now audited within their own teams as this provided more value and relevance which engaged people. As part of this process team managers could now deal with the issues as they arose during the course of an audit. It was apparent that the cultural issue of interpretation had now changed.

Members were informed by the DCS that managers were expected to grade cases appropriately and were urged to err on the side of caution, as any risk concerning a child should be dealt with curiously. It was better to over represent than under represent the risk. The DCS explained that it was an essential area of business to assess the risk, the question was how good were we at spotting it, assessing it and acting on it, this would attribute to being deemed a good authority and there was still some way to go.

The Committee remarked that the main focus was the risk to the child, and the numerous forms people had to complete were in effect a risk reduction for the authority. The committee questioned the order of the risk, as primary the focus should be that of the child. Therefore balanced decisions required a clear process map.

The Director of Children's Safeguarding explained that in terms of risk, the authority was now very focused and clear standards of risk had been set out for social workers. Based on the Eileen Monroe Report which encouraged reductions in the high levels of bureaucracy within social work nationally, the service was actively looking to make processes and assessments leaner. Officers explained that tools were in place to assess risk but it was essential to target the front line services first and foremost. The Head of Quality Children and Families explained that in the last decade Social Work nationally had become process biased, however this was no longer the case and staff were being retrained to remember the primary focus was the life of the child.

The committee agreed to continue to monitor this area closely.

Resolved

That the report be received.

5. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Director of Children's Services (DCS), Chris Spencer presented the report. The DCS reported that there were a number of areas across Children's Social Care where performance had improved or continued to improve since November 2018. The Committee were advised that this performance would need to be maintained despite the challenging factors of a system under pressure and continued workforce turnover, which resulted in recruitment issues. However, given all these pressures there was a trajectory of improvement.

It was reported that social worker caseloads were now more manageable, as such morale had improved and social workers were beginning to feel more valued and supported in their role. In addition, weekly performance meetings were being undertaken, which had also contributed to this change.

Members appreciated that further improvements were required in those areas where performance was not progressing or where issues were still evident for a reducing number of children, in order for all children to be seen, assessed or worked within a timely way and have plans in place to support progress, protection and transition to adulthood. The Committee were pleased to note that no children had been left in unsafe circumstances.

The DCS shared his initial thoughts following Ofsted's visit with committee members and was awaiting the latest outcome letter from Ofsted. He anticipated there would be a number of issues that would need to be improved although the trajectory is good.

In response to a question relating to the visiting of children, it was explained that children were expected to be seen in and out of the home environment and on their own in order to gain the individuals view. It was noted that 76.3% of children subject to a child protection plan had been visited in the last ten days, it was explained that this direction of travel had been improving since July 2018 (60.5%). Member's attention was drawn to summary of key areas performance as detailed within the report (pages 24 & 25).

Members questioned the number of missing children, in terms of age distribution, the number of times they went missing, from where and the reasons given in the return interview. The Committee requested that these areas be looked at in more detail and requested a report on the impact of these circumstances. **Action – DCS/Andy Dempsey**

The Committee wished to know how relationships were with the courts, officers explained that there were pressures with the local courts, as they were running at

capacity which affected timescales. The DCS explained that he had a good working relationship with Judge Wildblood and had regular meetings in an effort to improve services, however the capacity of the local family court was insufficient. The DCS explained that in order to deal with the backlog and reduce the need to travel further afield, another part time judge had been appointed. Members requested that an invitation be extended to Judge Wildblood, as they were keen to discuss the issues with him. **Action – DCS/Andrea Griffiths**

Resolved

That the report be received.

6. REVENUE MONITORING

The Finance Business Partner, Suzanne Hall, informed the committee that the report highlighted the position as at November 2018. The current position for non-DSG funded services was an overspend position of £7.23 million (6.81% of budget). The underlying over-spend was £9.83 million, £5.98 million being external placement costs, which reduces to £7.23 million when offset by £2.6 million of Business Rates Retention pilot income. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funded services are forecast to be over-spent by £4.22 million in-year and this exceeds uncommitted balances resulting in an over-spend of £1.92 million.

Resolved

That the Committee noted the position statement.

7. CHILDREN'S CENTRES - A POSITION STATEMENT

Unfortunately the main report had been omitted from the agenda pack, therefore the decision was taken to delay this item to the March meeting. **Action: Wendy Williams**

8. CHILDREN AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Director of Partnerships and Strategy (DPS), Andy Dempsey, presented the report in great detail. The Committee noted the progress made in relation to further developing the local arrangements for Youth Justice with a particular emphasis on the work being undertaken to prevent the detention of children in police stations following charge. It was explained that the development of the protocol had a great deal of support from the Assistant Chief Constable and custody suite officers. All parties recognised that children being detained in the cells overnight was a difficult issue to deal with and were supportive of reducing the opportunity for such situations to occur. It was reported that in the last quarter, three children had spent the night in the cells.

A vigorous discussion took place which assisted officers in the development of the plan. Officers explained that the local authority was not provided with a specific

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grant or funding stream to meet this duty, as such the costs for children transferred to the care of the local authority were met from existing budgets for children in care.

There was unanimous support for this protocol and members offered to liaise with officers if they required further support. The DPS informed members that the protocol was written with a small number of individuals in mind. It was evident that the compounding issues were only known at the point of arrest, it was suggested that the charging flow chart, as published in national guidance should be amended accordingly and worded sensitively to assist custody officers who had to process the child. The aim of the protocol was to provide continuity and safeguard the child.

Members felt it was an appalling experience for a child to spend a night in the cells and were deeply concerned for those children, where there was no option but to bed down in the cells overnight before being interviewed. The DPS explained unfortunately at times there was no option but to detain a child in the custody suite overnight, rather than transferring a child in the early hours of the morning. The DPS accepted members concerns and agreed to take the point on board.

It was noted that many children in authority care were often disconnected from their social worker over the weekend. Therefore, it was essential that each agency understood and gained a clear understanding of the reality of the situation.

The DPS explained that the protocol wouldn't 'land' until they had met with custody suite staff to implement the process and develop an understanding. It was evident that there was a great deal of work to do, in order to get it right.

In response to a question, it was noted that if a child breached an Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction (ASBI) they would be arrested, naturally this appeared to be an ever decreasing circle. Some situations were of a contradictory nature and colleagues were open to new lessons in order to bring about change.

The Committee were advised that children out of school were vulnerable, as such a focused piece of work was being undertaken which would involve multi agency meetings to avoid unintended consequences. In response to a question, it was noted that a presentation had been given to Safer Gloucestershire Board.

Members unanimously requested that this item be revisited at a future meeting, where a detailed update, including the revised protocol could be presented.

(Action – Andy Dempsey/AG)

The DCS agreed the development of the protocol was a good starting point, however some cohorts were not covered in the protocol. It was suggested that perhaps an appendix should be included to cover the omitted cohorts. The Committee welcomed and agreed this approach as a helpful way forward. Cllr Coleman offered to work with officers to devise the cohort list. **(Action - Andy Dempsey/Cllr Coleman)**

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The DPS informed the Committee that the police were supportive of this area of work, however all parties would need to be persistent and work together to expand the cohort and the fine detail.

Resolved

That the report be received.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.43 pm