

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 18 July 2019 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

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| Charlotte Blanch | Cllr Colin Hay |
| Dr Richard Castle | Cllr Dr Andrew Miller |
| Cllr Chris Coleman | Cllr Loraine Patrick |
| Cllr Stephen Davies | Cllr Brian Robinson (Chairman) |
| Cllr Bernard Fisher | Cllr Lesley Williams MBE (Vice-Chairman) |

In attendance: Kevin Crompton - Interim Chair of the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board
Andy Dempsey - Director of Partnerships and Strategy
Kate Langley - Head of Youth Offending Service
Chris Spencer – Director of Children’s Services
Cllr Richard Boyles – Cabinet Member Children's Safeguarding and Early Years

Apologies: Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People and Cllr Alan Preest

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

33. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting on Thursday 23 May 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment: -

Minute 21.17 remove the second ‘not’ in the first sentence such that it reads: Members did not feel that the process for identifying a MAT for the school to join was sufficiently transparent, and took too long, causing delays and concerns for parents and pupils.

34. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

34.1 Serious Case Review ‘James’

34.1.1 Serious Case Review (SCR) 0116 ‘James’ had been published the previous day and it was agreed that Kevin Crompton, Interim Chair of the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB), would present the findings of this SCR to the committee. Mr Crompton informed the committee that the convention with SCRs was to anonymise the individual to protect the remaining relatives; the BBC and other local media had chosen not to do so.

34.1.2 Mr Crompton informed members that ‘James’ died in awful circumstances. The SCR process was not about apportioning blame but to identify learning opportunities. The events that led to ‘James’ death took place three years ago; quite a lot of the practice at that time related to how partners were managing ‘James’ sibling. ‘James’ mother was in denial about the domestic abuse that she was experiencing, and lied about her drug use. All safeguarding partners needed to learn from this case.

34.1.3 The committee was informed that the report identified that there had been a lack of professional curiosity and challenge; questions had not been asked when the opportunity to do so had arisen. It was questioned whether this death could have been prevented. Mr

Crompton stated that in his view the professionals involved could have called a strategy meeting to share information which would have meant they would have been better prepared/informed. He was, however, of the view that the mother would not have cooperated, and doubted whether the threshold would have been met for a care order. He reflected that the professionals involved should have been more aware of the risks. Whilst the professionals involved could have managed the case better and to some extent some aspects could have been predictable, he did not think that this death was preventable.

- 34.1.4 There was a shared view that yet again information sharing had proved a barrier, and members were frustrated that this continued to be a cause for concern. Some members were of the view that the concerns should have been spotted. The committee was clear that we must get this right. Mr Crompton accepted members' points. He stated that information sharing had improved so it was disappointing that this had been such a significant factor in this case.
- 34.1.5 Chris Spencer, Director of Children's Services, informed the meeting that he did not disagree with Mr Crompton's statements. He also informed members that when he had joined the council this report had been in draft form. The report had been redrafted as a result of intervention from himself and Mr Crompton as they had been of the view that it was not sufficiently independent. This had contributed to the delay in publication. He also stated that we were already in the position where we had addressed the shortcomings identified in the report.
- 34.1.6 A committee member commented that everyone used different systems which made it hard to share data. They also questioned how often a strategy meeting was called by someone other than a social worker. In response Andy Dempsey, Director of Partnerships and Strategy, explained that this data was not available as irrespective of who asked for the strategy meeting it would always be the social worker who would open the case online. He was clear that the views of partners would heavily influence the decision to call a strategy meeting. The committee was also informed that Gloucestershire has a higher proportion of strategy discussions compared to other areas; we needed to be more consistent in our approach and to not be too unnecessarily intrusive in people's lives.
- 34.1.7 In response to a question it was explained that the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) was committed to giving feedback when concerns were reported, but Mr Dempsey acknowledged that this did not always happen. Members reiterated concerns regarding data sharing with one member stating that in their experience when discussing cases it was never possible to speak to the same person twice, and that it was necessary to put everything in writing. A member commented that it was important that there was a clear understanding of what data could be shared.
- 34.1.8 It was explained that the MASH received over 200 contacts per month, and there was complexity and challenge involved in the work to respond to these cases. Mr Crompton reminded the committee that we rarely celebrated the many good cases, and reinforced that the children's safeguarding system in the UK was the best in the world.
- 34.1.9 Mr Spencer informed the committee that he could not guarantee that this would not happen again. Whilst accepting improvement was necessary it was important not to lose sight of the fact that the true culprits were the perpetrators. Mr Crompton explained that with regard to information sharing there were often difficulties around consent, particularly in the early stages. In this case the parents did everything they could to avoid giving consent. However, new guidance indicated that refusal of consent could be an indication that there were concerns that needed to be acted on. His philosophy was 'dare to share' and felt that professionals needed to take this approach. Members agreed.

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34.1.10 The committee agreed that social work was a difficult profession and that we should applaud those people that do this job. It was questioned whether the wider group of adults that came into contact with young people within school settings knew how to raise concerns. Mr Crompton explained that the volume of contacts received by the MASH seemed to indicate that people did know. He also explained that every teacher and employee at a school should know who their safeguarding lead was. He emphasised that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility.

34.1.11 In response to questions it was explained that given the level of concealment by the mother it was difficult to see how a third party could have guessed that domestic abuse was a factor in this case, particularly as the elder sibling was thriving at the time. This chimed with the national debate on domestic abuse.

34.1.12 The committee agreed that it was important for all members of council as corporate parents to be fully informed on the issues that arose through the SCRs. It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would take this forward with Mr Crompton.

ACTION: Chair/Vice Chair

34.2 Annual Report

34.2.1 Kevin Crompton, Interim Chair GSCB, discussed the process that had led to the changes in safeguarding governance. The work of the GSCB during the last 12 months had been dominated by the transition to the new governance arrangements.

34.2.2 As of 15 July 2019 the GSCB would no longer exist. However there remained a residual function relating to the outstanding SCRs; these must be completed and published by July 2020. In response to questions it was explained that the SCRs would be published as soon as we were able to, but for some criminal proceedings were involved; each case had its own complications. There was also a shortage of SCR authors nationally. It was also explained that there was a national panel that reviewed SCRs.

34.2.3 Mr Crompton informed the committee that he had no concerns with regard to the transition process. The Business Unit that had supported the GSCB would now support the new arrangements.

34.2.4 It was commented that the use of the category 'other' on the charts was not helpful, and questioned whether this data could be broken down further. It was explained that the allegations management system was being replaced and in future this detail would be available. At present it would require a manual trawl through the data. The committee was assured that the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) system in Gloucestershire was very effective.

34.2.5 In response to questions relating to the funding arrangements for children's safeguarding Mr Spencer explained that currently the majority of the funding came from the council. However under the new arrangements there was equal responsibility across safeguarding partners which in his view meant that there should be equal funding; the Police and Health were talking about equitable funding. This would be discussed at the Safeguarding Executive. He was of the view that the base budget was sufficient. A particular pressure related to SCRs as there was a high daily rate for report authors.

34.2.6 It was requested that a contextualised report on safeguarding matters be received at a future committee meeting.

ACTION: Andrea Clarke

35. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN - WORKING TOGETHER 2018 NEW ARRANGEMENTS

- 35.1 The Director of Children's Services presented the detail of the new Children's Safeguarding working arrangements. He thanked Andy Dempsey, Director of Partnerships and Strategy, for his work on this issue. He confirmed that the committee would continue to receive reports on children's safeguarding. He felt that under the previous system there had been insufficient focus on delivery.
- 35.2 The committee welcomed the changes commenting that these appeared to address concerns raised by the committee in previous years.
- 35.3 It was commented that this all looked good but it was about what happened 'on the ground'. Mr Dempsey agreed and explained that this was a statement of intent. Following on from questions asked in relation to schools he also informed the committee that there had been a safeguarding event with schools on 17 July 2019 discussing thresholds in education settings; there would be another event in the Autumn. Mr Dempsey acknowledged that it was important to be clear with schools what the offer to them was. Members were also informed that a conference on the early help strategy was scheduled for the Autumn. This work was acknowledged by committee members but they were clear that the main factor was whether this was working 'on the ground'.
- 35.4 Charlotte Blanch, Clifton Diocese representative and Headteacher at The Catholic School of St Gregory the Great in Cheltenham, informed the meeting that Primary Headteachers in Cheltenham were trying to develop a Cheltenham Offer but were struggling to get the secondary schools on board.

36. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

- 36.1 Kate Langley, Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS), gave a detailed presentation on the aims, objectives and outcomes (so far) of the Children First scheme. (For information the presentation slides were uploaded to the council's website and included in the minute book.)
- 36.2 The committee also received a detailed presentation of the Youth Justice Plan by the Director Partnerships and Strategy. This plan also outlined the findings of the visit to Gloucestershire by HMIP (Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons) as part of their thematic inspection on youth resettlement. In response to a question the committee was assured that the ACEs checklist was built into the system, but it was acknowledged that this aspect and mental health support could be more explicit within the Action Plan.
- 36.3 Committee members were impressed with the outcomes achieved by the Children First scheme, and expressed their support of this work. Members were particularly impressed with the positive impact on the number of first time entrants and reoffending rates; and the focus being to see the child first and the offender second. The committee acknowledged that given the perception from the general public that all crimes should be prosecuted it had been a significant move to take this restorative approach forward. The impact of this scheme on a young person's life chances should not be underestimated.
- 36.4 A member stated that the committee should be outraged that young people have to go to the Parc Youth Offending Institute (YOI) in Bridgend, Wales; this was a two and a half hour journey. He also drew attention to the observations/criticisms from the thematic inspection. He also reiterated his concerns regarding the use of cells overnight for young people and

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welcomed Ms Langley's assurance that a transfer protocol was now in place with the Police on this matter and that the numbers had reduced.

- 36.5 Ms Langley acknowledged the concerns regarding Parc YOI and did not disagree with them. She informed the committee that the YOS did often transport families to Parc YOI to visit a family member. She also explained that the number of YOI establishments had been reduced and that Parc was the facility identified for young offenders from Gloucestershire.
- 36.6 The member also raised concerns with regard to the awareness of Children First across all Police Officers. His experience was that some Police Officers claimed that they were not aware of this initiative. As a solicitor this presented difficulties for him as it impacted on the advice he was able to give to his client. Members were disappointed that there remained officers who were not aware of this office. Ms Langley informed the committee that there had initially been some resourcing challenges but a full time coordinator was now in place, and there was now a presence in Police Stations seven days a week and it was hoped that this would help with these situations. She also explained that Children First was included in the induction training for new recruits and in divisional training events.
- 36.7 In response to a question it was explained that Police key performance indicators/targets were not adversely affected by the Children First scheme. It was also explained that work was in place with Victim Support to support the victims of crime. Work was also undertaken to review the victim's journey; Restorative Gloucestershire also received feedback from victims of crime.
- 36.8 The committee supported and endorsed the Children First scheme, and also noted the Youth Justice Plan and agreed to receive an update on progress of the Plan at a future meeting.
- 37. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN**
The committee discussed this item alongside the Children First item. Please see minute 36.
- 38. WORK PROGRAMME 2019**
The committee agreed to add bullying in schools to the workplan. Members also wanted to understand what progress there had been against the recommendations made by the Permanent Exclusions Task Group, particularly given that the Overview and Scrutiny Management had been de-commissioned following the review of scrutiny.

CHAIRMAN

Meeting concluded at 1.02 pm