

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 26 May 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Linda Cohen	Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington
Cllr David Drew	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller (Chairman)
Cllr Ben Evans (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Emma Nelson
Cllr Beki Hoyland	Ambassador for Vulnerable Children & Young People

Officers: Chris Spencer (Director of Children's Services), Kirsden Harrison (Director of Education), Andy Dempsey (Director of Partnerships & Strategy), Rob England (Head of Quality & Safeguarding (Children & Young People), Kat Auckett (Operations Director; Youth Support Team) and Andrea Griffiths (Democratic Services).

Councillors: Councillor Stephen Davies (Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years) and Councillor Philip Robinson (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Bus Transport).

Apologies: Charlotte Blanch, Suzanne Hall, Cllr Tim Harman and Cllr Stephen Hirst

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Andrew Miller declared he had been approved as a foster carer for the Authority.

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

20.1 That the minutes of the previous meetings held on the 10th March 2022 and the 22nd April 2022 were both approved as a correct record.

21. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

21.1 The Director of Partnerships & Strategy presented the report in association with Operations Director; Youth Support Team. Members were advised that there was a duty placed upon the Authority as the accountable body, to bring forward an annual youth justice plan. The format was determined by the youth justice board and the youth support team worked closely with the partner agencies in order to give the plan some substance.

- 21.2 It was reported that there had been a significant upshift in youth service funding nationally, and the focus was now on early intervention. Officers explained the Youth Service Team was working closely with the supporting families programme and this was proving to be a successful alliance to build upon for the future.
- 21.3 In addition, the Children First Scheme had the ability to divert young people away from the youth justice system, and the scheme had been in operation for four years and the figures locally were lower than regional and national figures. The number of reoffenders and types of crime were monitored closely, it was explained there was some disparity between the local and national figures and this was depicted in the performance report. Officers were working hard to resolve the disparity between the local and national data but remained confident with local data figures.
- 21.4 Data was compiled by ethnicity and gender, there was some concern over youth violence and a bid had been submitted for further funding. Members noted that Gloucestershire was deemed to be a relatively safe county, but there had been a spike with youth violence recently and it was necessary to understand what was the primary cause, in order to intervene more effectively.
- 21.5 Members were advised that custody was a last resort for young people, the rate in Gloucestershire had always been low, however officers expected figures to rise as a large number young people had been remanded on custody, due to the severity offences and this would undoubtedly affect the performance figures.
- 21.6 The Committee noted that The Director of Partnerships & Strategy, was also the Chair of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and he recognised the challenges ahead, overall he felt there was good engagement with the partnership agencies and there was an equal role to play for all. It was recognised that children outside of school were at greater risk of offending, the aim was to provide a wrap-around service to address those various factors, while protecting the community from harm.
- 21.7 The Operations Director explained the partnership board quarterly report and highlighted the main points. She explained the draft Youth Justice Annual Plan (YJAP), which was yet to be approved and was very much a work in progress. The YJAP showed the trends in Gloucestershire and how the service intended to work to address those concerns, it was noted that consultation had taken place with young people and the partner agencies.
- 21.8 In terms of the quarterly report, over 59% of children were diverted through the Children First Scheme, which had resulted in a much lower reoffending rate. The diversionary scheme was seen as a good way of getting young people to engage and bring about a positive impact. In terms of benchmarking, Gloucestershire (38%) was slightly below the national average (40%), it was recognised that children out of education presented the greatest impact and the effect on the local community.
- 21.9 The Director of Partnerships & Performance referred to a case of a young person who faced a terrorism charge, as such his offer of an educational placement had

been withdrawn which in turn had made him vulnerable. He felt it was necessary for partners to hold their nerve and offer support. Members were advised that the young person was now subject to high level surveillance, it proved that early intervention and education can make a real difference to a young person's life.

- 21.10 Officers felt it was necessary to engage with schools to prevent them from excluding young people and to offer support to schools to help them manage those young people rather than exclude pupils, which left them vulnerable to other influences. It was noted that the Director of Education was also very supportive of the programme and was working closely with schools on this concept.
- 21.11 Members wondered why there was an increase in the number of new initiatives. Officers explained there were no major failings, however the team were striving for better outcomes for young people as they felt all young people deserved to be in some of education, and there was currently an element of disproportionality that needed addressing. Members were informed that there were some new initiatives but the majority were the continued improvement of good practice.
- 21.12 In response to a question, the committee were advised that in terms of offending and reoffending there was strong relationship between youth violence and vulnerability which on occasion was exacerbated by social media. The Youth Offending Service were working closely with the police and the wider partnership as serious youth violence and child exploitation impacted across the agencies.
- 21.13 The Director of Partnerships and Strategy explained it was necessary to enhance operability between the agencies and share health/social data to help build processes. He felt it was essential to offer diversion and intervention to build trust in order to put young people on right path. It was noted the service had recently released a revised safeguarding policy.
- 21.14 Officers advised the Committee that they were actively working at strategic and local levels and it was necessary to have partnership working as the journey for young people needed to be seamless and the support needed to be holistic and timely in order to bring about a positive change. As it was evident that a young person could become disengaged if passed from pillar to post. The Youth Justice Management Board had devised the plan in order to deliver a joined up approach between health, education, police and the youth justice service.
- 21.15 In response to a question, members were informed that it was important that the young person's family or carers were involved in the process, as it was important to build key connections going forward. It was explained there were links with the supporting families programme and social care in the absence of a parent. Officers felt it was important not to criminalise a child within a care setting.
- 21.16 The Committee were advised there were no secure remand centres in Gloucestershire, the nearest secure settings were located in Bristol and Cardiff. Officers were aware of the importance of family links and they worked closely with the centres to prevent a family breakdown, as family members often faced logistical challenges when visiting the centre and young person.

- 21.17 The Committee were notified there was a national increase in demand for remand placements, as the nature of placement was as a result of a serious offence. It was recognised that quite often this type of placement would have a serious impact on a young person's emotional growth and mental wellbeing. The number of secure placements going forward would depend on how many were found guilty and their sentence. Members noted there was a lack of local provision.
- 21.18 In response to a question, it was explained the DFE had a capital programme available to build a young person's secure setting, however they were deemed to be difficult to manage and no-one in the local community wanted it their back yard.
- 21.19 Members questioned the alternative to remand and wished to know who decided on the placement. It was explained that it was the court's decision and strict guidance was adhered to, as usually remand was the last option. It was noted that those young people on remand were usually as a result of serious violence.
- 21.20 The DCS explained that the Youth Offending Service was subject to regulatory inspection, and the last inspection took place in 2019 which graded the service as 'requires improvement to be good', members appreciated this involved a complex scoring system. As a result, an action plan had been developed but the committee accepted there was no room for complacency.
- 21.21 Members referred to the number of vacancies within the service, it was explained that a number of staff had been recruited and would be in post in due course. There were vacancies across the teams and the majority of roles were part time youth roles. The management team hoped to fill the vacancies in due course, as the service had a good recruitment and retention rate.
- 21.22 The Committee were advised that Academies nationally had more exclusions however, locally this was not the case. The Operations Director would continue to work closely with DoE to ensure there were alternatives available to the exclusion process. It was noted that many teachers felt isolated in dealing some children and the risks involved. As such many head teachers were alone in the decision making process and school needed the opportunity to address their concerns and the appropriate support needed to be put in place.
- 21.23 Officers felt it was necessary for schools to adapt to children who don't necessarily respond well to desk based learning, and explained that alternative learning activities could be offered to build their self-esteem. Members recognised there were many children who were not in the appropriate education setting for them to flourish.

22. EDUCATION UPDATE - RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

- 22.1 The Director of Education (DoE) presented the report in detail and proceeded to update the Committee as a result of a request at the March meeting. It was noted that restorative practice was in use in Gloucestershire schools across the County.

- 22.2 The report explained how it was used throughout schools and the Authority in terms of the family hubs, restorative justice, etc. The restorative practice model had been promoted nationally by Molly McCloud and shared good practice methods. The projects aimed to train and develop others on a rolling basis.
- 22.3 It was recognised there were challenges for children in the transition period between primary and secondary schools. It was noted that the primary sector had embraced restorative practice much so than the secondary sector. The DoE suggested that for secondary school it was perhaps a question of scale and suggested that perhaps a different engagement model might be required for secondary school given the cohort of pupils and staff. Members were advised that the funding was due to cease in 2024 and it was necessary to secure future funding to continue beyond that date.
- 22.4 In response to a question, it was noted the primary schools head teachers and their staff lead on the practice. If supported well by the head teacher then it was possible to bring about a whole system change, it was essential to gain traction to bring about a positive change.
- 22.5 In response to a question, the DoE explained in her experience as a secondary head teacher, restorative practice competed within many other initiatives and it would be necessary for head teachers to commit to approximately three days of whole staff training. It was noted there were often issues around head teachers ethos, philosophy and the choice of direction in terms of behavioural management policies. She felt it was important for the Authority to engage with schools as a whole in order to bring about a positive change and this would be a challenge given there were 106 academies. In addition, there was a new Schools Bill which would impose a new set of academy trust standards and there would a statutory duty to cooperate with the local authority.
- 22.6 The DCS explained that the team were doing good work in schools, which was well received and the impact was significant. He felt it was essential to look at the impact if the service wanted Children's Services to support this programme going forward and the significant outcome. The DoE explained there were a large number of case studies available to support the programme and any future funding bids, it was important to articulate the outcomes. The DCS stated that he would like the programme to continue.
- 22.7 In response to a question, it was explained that it was not possible for the Local Authority to add clauses to new academy contracts to include restorative practice.
- 22.8 The Cabinet Member referred to the report and the fact that 'to do restorative practice is fairly easy, but to be restorative is often hard and takes time', he felt it was a mind-set for schools. He wondered if this concept was more readily embraced in faith schools, and asked if further work could be done to see if there was any direct correlation. The DoE explained that she didn't have the evidence available to confirm that point.

22.9 The Chair felt there were strong parallels between restorative practice and the youth justice system. He hoped by preserving with restorative practice in schools there would be fewer clients for the youth offending team in future. The Chair thanked the DoE for her concise, accurate and well delivered presentation.

23. PLAN FOR THE NEW THE BOARD AND NEW IMPROVEMENT PLAN

23.1 The DCS informed the Committee that the new draft improvement plan was being devised and scrutiny would have the opportunity to look at the new plan in due course. He proceeded to explain that the service was now in a very different stage of development, as children services where we no longer subject to intervention. The DCS recognised that it had been an exhausting journey undergoing mini inspections ever quarter and focused DfE visits but it had been worth the effort to bring about a positive change to the service.

23.2 Members were advised that the Improvement Board was also of the view that it now necessary to refresh and rebrand the Board, in order to face the new challenge of achieving a 'good' Ofsted rating. It was noted the Authority had been recently graded as 'in support and supervision' which was an official category and a DfE advisor was still assigned to the Authority.

23.3 It was noted the DCS had been tasked with a consultation process with board members, about the shape and configuration of the improvement board going forward. The findings were yet to be collated and no decisions as yet had been made, and further discussions were due to take place with the Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years.

23.4 The DCS advised based on the feedback received an independent chair was no longer required. Although he wished to add that Andrew Ireland had served the board very well as an independent chair, as he was previously a Director of Children Services in Kent, who had undergone the same experience with Ofsted and had helped to get Kent from inadequate to good. It was noted that Andrew had been very supportive of the Authority and his efforts were greatly appreciated.

23.5 The DCS suggested the responses had indicated that the Deputy Chief Executive (DCE), who was also the Finance Executive Director and Head of Resources would be an ideal candidate, as Children's Services were closely linked to the quality of support from corporate central services. It was noted that it was a recommendation of the Ofsted report that corporately something needed to be done with the IT service, as this was a continued frustration to frontline workers and the service continued to lose workers because of IT failures.

23.6 The DCS recognised it was a real barrier to the improvement journey and it was important to stabilise the system moving forward. As the DCE had direct responsibility for IT, it would undoubtedly help to speed the process up as he was very supportive of Children's Services and he understood what intervention meant both financially and in terms of quality of service.

- 23.7 Members were reminded there were still some substantive problems that needed to be addressed, for example placement stability and staffing issues, the DCS felt with the assistance of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources these issues could be overcome.
- 23.8 The DCS described the composition of the new board in detail, which would hopefully include representatives from the police authority, health, head teachers and the voluntary sector should be invited to join. He felt it was time to broaden the agenda going forward and new terms of reference would need to be devised.
- 23.9 He advised the committee there was no desire for cross party representation on the board. As the responses indicated that scrutiny should be sufficient for that purpose, and the board's plan would be reported to scrutiny on a regular basis.
- 23.10 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years explained the service was now moving forward and the improvement plan was being developed. He agreed that the plan should be presented to scrutiny as it was essential to change the focus to look forward and her agreed that a wider body of people would be beneficial and make the Board more flexible in its approach.
- 23.11 Some members raised concerns at the suggestion of having a senior officer as the Chair, they felt the position should be Independent of the Authority. In terms of the Improvement Board relationship with scrutiny, the committee felt it was necessary to clarify the roles were and they felt there should be cross party representation on the board.
- 23.12 The Cabinet Member took on board the points raised and understood the concerns but felt if the Chair's role was facilitated by a senior officer then there was consistency and he agreed there should be cross party representation on the Board.
- 23.13 Members were notified that Ofsted's view in terms of achieving a good rating, meant that the Authority needed to be good at partnership working. He added that the final details of the Improvement Board were yet to be discussed with Cabinet, however he personally felt that the idea of having somebody who had control and understanding of finance and of corporate bodies could prove to be a successful combination on the journey to good. The DCS reiterated that no decisions in terms of the Board had been made as yet.
- 23.14 The Committee appeared to be of a view that the nature of the board should widen the partnership as it would play an important role in delivering a sustainable good service. Members recognised the fundamental difference, that partners were part of the solution.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

24. PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4

24.1 The Committee noted the report.

25. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

25.1 The Committee noted the report.

26. REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

26.1 The Committee noted the report.

27. COMMITTEE'S WORK PLAN

27.1 The Committee discussed the work plan in detail and members were asked to email any additional items for inclusion to the clerk.

27.2 The Committee agreed that IT should be included on the agenda, given the impact it had on frontline staff and the concerns raised during the Ofsted inspection. The DCS advised the Committee that he had recently had a meeting with his corporate colleagues and had explained that there were considerable issues with the current IT infrastructure.

27.3 As a result, it had been agreed that Liquid Logic would be appointed to host the children's services electronic file system. It was noted that they hosted the same system for neighbouring authorities, as it proved a stable service for frontline staff. The Committee were advised that children services would struggle to progress at any pace, until the IT system was stabilised. The details were being explored and it was agreed that an update report would be provided to the November meeting.
(Action – CS)

27.4 Cllr Evans referred to his earlier request for Early Intervention/Help to be included on the work plan and he asked for examples used in other Authorities as a comparison. The DCS explained that the current service model had not broken down and it could always be improved. It was noted that Gloucestershire undertook regular peer reviews with Cornwall who were an outstanding Authority.

27.5 The Head of Quality & Safeguarding explained that Cornwall had some of the highest indicators of deprivation and difficulty, yet they were also one of the lowest funded children services nationally. He noted they were in a very unusual position, as they were one of the most efficient and highly performing authorities nationally, as they had constructed an early help system that was front loaded and the emphasis strategically was on early health, early intervention and prevention.

27.6 It was noted that Cornwall's model involved early help teams, who worked intensively with families depending on the level of need or risk and the help remained continuous for the family for the duration of the episode. The Head of Quality & Safeguarding recognised it appeared to be a very economical model,

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

even though their system was under increasing pressure and agreed to being an update report to the Committee's March 2023 meeting. (Action -RE & CS)

- 27.7 It was also requested that the Bright Spots Survey Results be presented at the March meeting for discussion.
- 27.8 During the discussion, members questioned primary school exclusions, as it appeared the figures had increased significantly. The DoE explains there had been a drop in the number of secondary school exclusion but the service had seen a rise in the primary sector. She felt this was part of a complex picture around special educational needs and the capacity of special needs places. The DoE explained that alternative provision, the inclusion of special educational needs and primary exclusions could be dealt with jointly as they interlinked. It was agreed that a member briefing session be arranged sooner rather than later to discuss the current issues.
- 27.9 It was also noted that the SEN green paper would be presented in July and that may answer some of the committee's concerns. The DoE also added that academisation need to be discussed in order to give a wider context for members, it was agreed that the committee clerk would discuss the issues with the DoE, Chair and Vice-Chair in order to develop a briefing session. Member were asked to submit their suggestions to the clerk via email

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.10 pm