

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 23 October 2023 commencing at 10.00 am at the Gardners Lane Children and Families Centre.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

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

Apologies: Charlotte Blanch, Cllr Linda Cohen, Cllr Paul McLain and Cllr Kathy Williams

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 The Committee accepted and the Chair signed the minutes of the meeting on the 14th September 2023.

4. CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

4.1 Ann James, Executive Director of Children's Services, invited the following representatives to give a presentation on Gloucestershire's multi-agency approach to child sexual exploitation (CSE):

- Jane Price, Child Exploitation Coordinator for Children's Services at Gloucestershire County Council (GCC),
- Dan Jones, Central Area Manager (Specialist Services) at GCC,
- Lynne Speak, Head of Service – Youth Support at Shaw Trust delivered by Prospects Service,
- Jane Willett, Practice and Development Manager – Youth Support Team at Shaw Trust,
- Kirsty Sedgeman, Specialist Nurse for Safeguarding Children at Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust,
- Detective Superintendent Steve Bean, Head of Public Protection at Gloucestershire Constabulary.

4.2 The focus of Gloucestershire's approach to CSE centred around the 4 'P's'.

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- Prevent (to support and stop exploitation)
- Prepare (to ensure a person-centred response to exploitation)
- Protect (to reduce vulnerability and adapt to changes in threat)
- Pursue (to pursue exploiters and reduce risk)

The full presentation can be found in the agenda report pack

4.3 Responding to a member's question about coordination, officers confirmed that the umbrella board for the multiagency approach to CSE was the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership which included a subgroup specifically centred around CSE and missing children. It was stated that missing children were particularly at risk to CSE. Officers suggested the need for a digital information sharing site which would be used to identify vulnerable children and highlight those who could be at risk of CSE by linking up different information such as health and police records. It was stated that other counties already had this type of system in place.

4.4 When asked by the Committee what was needed to be able to create a digital sharing platform, the officers confirmed that once the IT was sufficiently stable, the digitised information sharing site could be created.

Recommendation – The Committee recommended the creation of a digitised information sharing system.

4.5 Officers confirmed that they worked with colleagues and shared best practice where possible. Gloucestershire was part of the National Working Group, the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Partnership, the National Reference Group for Missing Children and the National CSE Taskforce which made for good integration with other practice groups.

4.6 Responding to a member's question about how they measured the success of their methods, the Officers confirmed that it was difficult to measure outcomes particularly prevention of CSE. Each agency within the CSE multiagency approach had their own success measures. An example given was that reducing the number of missing episodes of a child was viewed as a success because it lowered the child's risk of CSE. Another officer confirmed that they measured success through the awareness of the risk of CSE within every community as this caused communities to be more proactive if they saw signs of CSE.

4.7 A member raised concern about unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and how they could be protected from CSE. It was confirmed that children arriving in Gloucestershire could be either through 'spontaneous presentation' or the more

common way was via the National Transfer Scheme where Government informed GCC of the children who needed to be placed in the county. However, the Officers confirmed that GCC tried to proactively offer places to children when they had capacity at a foster home or supported accommodation in order to be ahead of the curve. It was identified that these children can be most at risk of being exploited which was why it was so important to have support in place. It was stressed that if members had any concerns, they should make officers aware.

- 4.8 When asked, the officer confirmed that currently the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Gloucestershire was in the mid-70s. The Government required that 0.1% of Gloucestershire's under-18 population should be unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are looked after by GCC. That would equate to 120 children, so currently Gloucestershire is below its quota. However, the officer confirmed that Gloucestershire was not the only county who were below and confirmed that plans were being developed to deliver suitable accommodation and care for the children.
- 4.9 Responding to a member's question about how family hubs could be used to assist with the prevention of CSE, the officers confirmed that the family hubs gave an opportunity to provide localised support to each community and to understand the needs and the risks of the individual communities.
- 4.10 A member raised concern about the 16% solved rate for CSE crimes, the officer confirmed that some of the reasons why they were so low was due to a lack of evidence or more commonly victims not wanting to engage with the criminal justice system.
- 4.11 When asked if there was support for vulnerable parents who may be coerced into exploiting their children, officers confirmed that there was currently no specific support system. It was stated that officers often work with the young person first and then later with the parents if necessary. It was stated that there used to be a family support officer but due to the removal of funding, this position no longer existed.
- 4.12 Responding to a member's question about if measures were being put in place to fill that support gap, the officer confirmed that they had created media campaigns to educate parents, but targeting the right audience was difficult. One officer highlighted that they had created parent sessions in schools but again there was an issue of accessing all parents. It was identified by the officers that there was national guidance available. The Chair asked the officers to ascertain what resources were available on the GCC website.

ACTION – Ann James

4.13 The Committee asked about what counselling services were available to victims of CSE. The officers confirmed that there was not a specific CSE counselling service, and it was identified that most counselling wait times were extensive. One officer did state that they often needed to work with the young people to build up their self-esteem and confidence to be able to talk about what had happened before they could go to counselling. It was identified that young people might be referred to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or Teens in Crisis (TIC). One of the officers confirmed that she would check the counselling provision for CSE victims.

ACTION – Kirsty Sedgeman

5. GLOUCESTERSHIRE FAMILY HUBS SUMMARY REPORT

5.1 This item was taken as read and a brief summary was provided by Wendy Gray, Head of Service - Early Help and Prevention Commissioning. The following points were identified:

- In April 2024, the new Children and Family Centre Contract would be implemented which will allow Gloucestershire to create Family Hubs throughout the County. It was stated that the contract was currently out to tender.
- The new contract would involve using the existing seventeen Children and Family Centres as cornerstones of Gloucestershire's Family Hub approach providing a multi-agency Family Help/Early Help strategy.
- The vision was to create 'one stop shops' of services for families across the county.

5.2 When asked about the commissioning process, the officer identified that there were three contracts in the tender process which were split into areas (Tewkesbury and Cheltenham, Stroud and the Cotswolds, Forest of Dean and Gloucester). There may not be one provider for the county but instead each contract would be given depending on the best fit for the individual contract area.

5.3 A member welcomed the transition into Family Hubs which provided support for 0–19-year-olds, however he questioned what would be implemented to change the current children's centres to be more welcoming to teenagers. The Officer confirmed that not all of the details had been decided, it was emphasised that the current youth service buildings would become part of the Family Hub network and that the county would be creating an identifiable Family Hub logo.

The officer confirmed that once all the contracts had been confirmed, there would be discussions with the service providers about the individual needs of each area. Also, it was stated that an area manager would be allocated to make sure that individual communities received the support they required.

5.4 Whilst it was appreciated that the tender period had not yet ended, a member asked if there had been a good level of uptake so far, the officer confirmed that they undertook seventeen site visits for potential providers and they gave the providers an opportunity to ask clarification questions. They had had 184 clarification questions which they viewed as a good level of market engagement.

5.5 A member asked what was being done to create consistency of service across the three different contract areas, the officer stated that GCC's commissioning team were involved in the creation of provision in each of the three areas and they were focused on creating a consistent core offer throughout the county. It was also confirmed that the contracts included a level of oversight from GCC Area Managers in social care to ensure that providers delivered the necessary outcomes and were able to adapt beyond the core offer to meet local need.

6. HOME SCHOOL TRANSPORT IN RURAL AREAS

6.1 This item was taken as read and the committee were given time to ask questions. Kirsten Harrison, Director of Education, provided opening comments on the two separate policies and how they can become conflated at the point of transition to secondary school, where children move from a local primary school they walk to and may need to travel to secondary school at a greater distance using public transport, transported by parents or may be eligible for home to school transport.

6.2 Some members used their questions to raise specific school transport issues which had been brought to their attention by Arlingham Parish Council. It was identified that the Admissions and Home to School Transport in rural areas document with reviewed links should be sent to all Members so that they had access to resources in order to better understand how the policies operate and to support their residents.

ACTION – Kirsten Harrison/Democratic Services

6.3 A member questioned whether the Family Hubs could be used to help support families with understanding the school admission process as it was acknowledged that it could be seen as complicated. The officers confirmed that

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it could be an area of support provided by the Family Hubs when they were established.

6.4A member also asked whether the committee could receive a copy of what parents received for the school admissions process before it was sent next year to consider its accessibility, and the officers agreed to send the document to the committee when it was available.

ACTION – Kirsten Harrison

7. GLOUCESTERSHIRE CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY DUTY REPORT

7.1 Due to time restrictions, it was decided that this report would be deferred to the next meeting.

ACTION – Democratic Services

8. WORK PLAN

8.1 Due to time restrictions, it was decided that the work plan would be emailed to members for their suggestions.

ACTION – Democratic Services

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 12.08