

# CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 15 June 2017 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

**PRESENT:**

Charlotte Blanch	Cllr Loraine Patrick
Dr Richard Castle	Ambassador for Vulnerable Children & Young People
Cllr Chris Coleman	Cllr Brian Robinson (Chairman)
Cllr Stephen Davies	Cllr Jack Williams
Cllr Joe Harris	Cllr Lesley Williams MBE
Cllr Andrew Miller	

Substitutes: Cllr Phil Awford (In place of Cllr Alan Preest)

Others in attendance: Neelam Bhardwaja - Interim Director of Improvement and Operations  
Tim Browne - Head of Education  
Alison Williams – Interim Director of Children’s Services  
Cllr Richard Boyles – Cabinet Member Children and Young People

Apologies: Cllr Alan Preest

## **1. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRPERSON**

- 1.1 The Chairman informed the committee that he thought it would be more appropriate to defer this decision until later in the council year to allow new members and the new committee settle into their roles, and be better able to consider whether a Vice Chairperson was necessary.
- 1.2 However the Liberal Democrat members on the committee disagreed with this view and proposed and seconded Cllr Jack Williams.
- 1.3 The Labour member felt that should the Chairman be unavailable for a meeting it would be sufficient to elect a Chairperson on the day.
- 1.4 As there was no one view across the committee membership on this matter the Chairman asked members to vote on whether they wished to defer the election of a Vice Chairperson. The outcome of the vote was that the committee would defer the election of a Vice Chairperson.
- 1.5 In response to a question the Chairman explained that he wanted the committee to have regular work planning meetings to plan the committee’s work.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Richard Castle declared a personal interest as a governor at Gastrells Community Primary School.

Cllr Brian Robinson declared a personal interest as a governor at Dene Magna School, as a member of the Management Committee of the Gloucestershire Alternative Provision School, and as a Foster Carer.

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Charlotte Blanch declared a personal interest as an adoptive parent, and as Headteacher of the Catholic School of St Gregory the Great.

Cllr Phil Awford declared a personal interest as a governor of Minsterworth Church of England Primary School.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 9 MARCH 2017**

The minutes of the meeting on Thursday 9 March 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **4. CO-OPTION OF THE ROLE OF AMBASSADOR FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The committee agreed to co-opt the role of Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People on to the committee for the duration of this council (2017 – 2021).

### **5. OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND CARE SERVICES - INTERIM BRIEFING**

5.1 The Chairman explained that the Interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) would take the committee through the process and procedure required by the council in response to the findings of the Ofsted Inspection Report.

5.2 The Interim DCS informed the committee that having been judged to be inadequate the council would receive an Improvement Notice, which was a non-statutory intervention. It was explained that this meant that the Department for Education (DfE) recognised that (with support) the council has the capacity to improve. To support this process the council has been allocated an external consultant who would work with us three to four days a month for the coming year.

5.3 The council was required to establish an Improvement Board (IB) and the make-up of this Board would be determined in consultation with the DfE Advisor. This Board would meet monthly to review progress in relation to leadership and management, and help and protection; and the entire Improvement Plan would be reviewed on a quarterly basis. The DfE would review progress in 6 months time. A number of workstreams would report into the Improvement Board:-

- in Care and Care Leavers
- Leadership and Management
- Help and Protection
- Children Education
- Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB) Multi Agency Improvements
- Finance

5.4 The council was required to submit its Improvement Plan to the DfE by 20 September 2017. Ofsted would undertake quarterly monitoring visits to review progress against the Improvement Plan and to undertake case file audits; these visits would be over two days. The council could expect Help and Protection Services to be re-inspected in 12 to 18 months time.

5.5 The committee was assured that immediate action had been taken with regard to the cases identified during the inspection. Action has also been taken to address the drift and delay in cases, including the delay in getting minutes and actions from child protection conferences out promptly.

- 5.6 Members were deeply concerned with the findings of the inspection report. It was noted that the outcome of the Ofsted inspection in 2011 had been poor and the recommendations from that inspection had been taken forward seemingly to no avail; and it was suggested that there were potential learning opportunities from this earlier work. The Interim Director of Children's Services informed the committee that there had been a lot of work to address the 2011 inspection, but that, in retrospect, this had been too centralised and had not engaged the frontline sufficiently. It was also important to bear in mind the 20% increase in demand and the fact that 50% of the social worker workforce were newly qualified. The Interim Director of Improvement and Operations informed members that in 2011 issues relating to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) were not so prevalent, and similarly there was now a better understanding and recognition of the impact of the 'toxic trio' (domestic abuse, mental ill health, drug and alcohol misuse).
- 5.7 The Interim Director of Improvement and Operations informed the committee that when considering case work there had not been sufficient thought about the impact on the child. Going forward it would be important that everyone understood what good practice looked like; and a clear understanding that everything should be done with the child at the centre.
- 5.8 A committee member commented that there seemed to be a lack of awareness at the strategic level as to what the issues were at the front line. He also stressed the importance of mental health support to children and their families and asked whether this aspect would form part of the improvement board work going forward. The committee was assured that this would be part of the work, and the Future in Mind Strategy was the key driver in this respect.
- 5.9 Members reiterated their concerns and anger, and for some members a feeling that they had been lied to. It was asked why people had not been asking questions. There was an acknowledgement that culture change was challenging. Members also wanted the Improvement Board (IB) process to be as open and transparent as possible. It was explained that the issue of transparency was being considered; and that it was beneficial that the external consultant, who would Chair the IB, would give an external view on progress. With regard to quality assurance the council was looking to bring in an independent consultant to audit cases on a monthly basis to ascertain whether they were seeing improved practice.
- 5.10 The Interim DCS informed members that she has asked corporate services (eg. human resources) to take on some responsibilities (eg. exit interviews), and the Performance and Data team to present their analysis of Children's Social Care performance data. These steps were being taken as it was felt that previously every thing was too 'in-house to Children's Social Care. In addition scrutiny should request to see qualitative data on case file audits to enable them to triangulate information to inform their view of services.
- 5.11 It was questioned, by a committee member, what this committee could do to scrutinise this process, and indicated that he wanted to call in the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the previous Cabinet Member and previous Chairman of this committee and wanted to understand if the committee was able to do this. He also wanted to know what financial settlements have been reached with officers who have left the council as a result of this inspection. He also informed the committee that he was dismayed at the loss of the 'shadows'. He was concerned that the Adoption Service, which was performing well, would now be part of the Adoption West regional body, and questioned how much time officers had spent on this matter when they should have been doing other things. He also questioned why the meeting today was only considering process going forward rather than questioning the detail. He also stated that a request had been submitted for an extraordinary meeting of council and that this committee should support that request. The

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committee was informed that the Chairman of Council had agreed to this request and that this matter would be considered on 28 June 2017.

(Post meeting note: these questions were also asked at the meeting of full council on 28 June 2017 and the detail can be located at this link

<http://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=333&MId=8397&Ver=4.>)

- 5.12 The Chairman of the committee explained that as the inspection report had only been published two days ago it was important that all members had the opportunity to read and digest the contents, and recommendations, and give due consideration to the best way to scrutinise the improvement work.
- 5.13 With regard to the committee's role going forward members were reminded that the meeting in July 2017 would be focused on safeguarding, and this would give the opportunity to explore and identify options for the committee. The inspection report was the culmination of discussion with council members and staff and identified areas for improvement and the committee might wish to focus on these outcomes. It was expected that an LGA Advisor would be in attendance at the meeting in July to guide and advise the committee.
- 5.14 The Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People informed the committee that in the time she has worked at the council the Ambassadors have noticed a lack of evidence, in particular how impact was measured, and insufficient multi-agency working. The Clifton Diocesan representative informed the committee that some schools had been trying to raise concerns for some time and so from her perspective this outcome was not a surprise.
- 5.15 In conclusion, the Chairman assured members that the committee would be considering this matter in detail at the meeting on 13 July 2017.

## **6. OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

- 6.1 It was noted that as this was the first meeting of the committee in the new council it was important to set out the landscape of children's services to inform new members of the committee. The detailed presentation by the Interim Director of Children's Services, and Head of Education, included the council's statutory duties, the legislative background, the role of the local authority in education, and how the budget was allocated. (For information the presentation slides were uploaded to the council website.)
- 6.2 In response to a question members were updated on the current position with regard to section 20 placements. Members were pleased to note that the Interim Director Improvement and Operations has already met with the Bristol family court judge to discuss concerns that he has previously raised regarding practice at the council. The judge was happy to work with the council, and had offered to undertake a workshop with social workers to support their knowledge, understanding and expectations of the court process.
- 6.3 Members agreed that it was good to be able to draw on the data from the Online Pupil Survey (OPS). It was good to see that the OPS was showing that there was less bullying, although it was of concern to see that less young people reported being happy, were less confident about the future, and that some young people reported regularly feeling so worried about something that they could not sleep at night.
- 6.4 The education landscape has changed dramatically and it was important that committee members have a clear understanding of the council's role in this regard. It was noted that the committee expected to take a detailed look at this matter at the September 2017

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meeting, and would use this opportunity to follow up on the issue of Permanent Exclusions as requested by the committee in the previous council.

6.5 There was clearly a lot of work for the committee to take forward, and the detail in the presentation had helped members to identify items (in addition to safeguarding issues) for future consideration. It would be important to prioritise the committee's workload and the committee would therefore be undertaking regular work planning meetings. Items identified at this meeting were: -

- Children and young people's mental health (as indicated by the OPS)
- Youth Offending System
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Role of the local authority in education, and the national funding formula
- High needs strategy
- Permanent exclusions
- Children and young people educated at home
- Early years provision
- Demand on the system

## **CHAIRMAN**

Meeting concluded at 12.24 pm