

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 26 November 2020 commencing at 10.00 am at the Virtual Meeting - Web ex meeting.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Charlotte Blanch	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller (Chairman)
Dr Richard Castle	Cllr Loraine Patrick
Cllr Chris Coleman	Ambassador for Vulnerable Children & Young People
Cllr Stephen Davies	Cllr Brian Robinson
Cllr Bernard Fisher	Cllr Lesley Williams MBE (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Colin Hay	

Substitutes: Cllr Stephen Hirst (In place of Cllr Alan Preest)

Others in attendance: Chris Spencer – Director of Children’s Services
Cllr Richard Boyles - Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years
Cllr Patrick Molyneux - Cabinet Member for Economy, Education and Skills
Annette Blackstock – Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group
Detective Superintendent Arman Mathieson
Kevin Crompton – Independent Scrutineer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3. REPORT OF INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER - INTERIM REPORT 2019/2020

3.1 The committee was pleased to welcome Kevin Crompton (Independent Scrutineer), Annette Blackstock (Deputy Health Lead for Safeguarding Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group), Detective Superintendent Arman Mathieson (Gloucestershire Police), and Chris Spencer (Director of Children’s Services) to the meeting.

3.2 Mr Crompton informed the committee that this had been an exceptionally challenging year, but that the response from all partners had been good, and that there was a clear commitment from partners on safeguarding matters. He reminded members that under the Working Together arrangements safeguarding children in Gloucestershire was no longer the sole responsibility of the council but was now a shared responsibility between the council, Gloucestershire Police and the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (GCCG), collectively as the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Executive (GSCE).

3.3 Mr Crompton indicated that whilst there had been an improvement in how partners now worked together and talked to each other, improvement in the pace of response and improved working practices was still needed, particularly with regard to tracking responses

to issues, eg. Child Sexual Exploitation. He informed the meeting that in response to a serious case review (SCR) some years ago a neglect toolkit had been developed; this had not been utilised effectively across the partnership, in part due to the lack of capacity. This was now under review.

- 3.4 The Director of Children's Services (DCS) stated that he felt that Mr Crompton's report and presentation to the committee was a fair reflection of where we were as a partnership, and agreed that there was still work to be done. However, he was cautiously optimistic about the future of the partnership.
- 3.5 In response to questions Mr Crompton explained that every effort had been made to engage with schools through their representation groups, eg. Gloucestershire Association of Secondary Headteachers (GASH).
- 3.6 With regard to concerns re the drop in referrals during lockdown it was explained that the Police had given a lot of consideration to the impact of lockdown and the knock on effect in terms of referrals. Specially selected officers, experienced in dealing with vulnerable people had been utilised; and the Police had conducted sensitive visits to ensure that crime was not going on behind closed doors (this was not just about knocking on people's doors). Members were also informed that known risks had been managed as best as possible.
- 3.7 The DCS explained that the lockdown had raised important questions. Children's Services had been able to sustain good quality services throughout the lockdown; but it had, of course, had an impact. With children out of the sight of schools, one of the biggest referrers to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub), the risks had been heightened. The DCS informed members that he shared their concerns and was why the council had ran the (social) media campaign 'Out of sight but not out of harms way' early in the lockdown. He assured the committee that officers had done everything they could to make sure that children remained in our line of sight, but not being in school meant that this was a significant challenge.
- 3.8 The council had done everything it could to encourage parents to get vulnerable children and young people into school during lockdown; the council performed better in this regard than other local authorities in the south west. The council had also managed to conduct many face to face visits; and had been innovative, eg. in establishing the virtual court. It was anticipated that there would be a rise in the number of referrals with schools reopening. It was important to understand that trying to run services in a lockdown was complex and demanding, and logistically very difficult. A significant factor was that staff did not have the time or space for children to sidle up to them to let them know that there was a problem.
- 3.9 The committee was informed by the Added Member for the Clifton Diocese, and Primary School Headteacher, that it was tricky for staff at present. Everyone was doing extra duties and longer days, and they were not able to observe children being dropped off by parents which often gave a sense of what was happening in the family; but safeguarding was at the forefront of everyone's mind. The school was trying to release staff away from key learning to enable time to talk with children, but acknowledged that this was not necessarily at the time that children would choose. From their perspective Children's Services had worked well during the lockdown.
- 3.10 In response to questions Ms Blackstock (GCCG) informed the committee that, from the health perspective, communications across the partnership had worked well, and been cascaded to colleagues effectively through the forums in place, eg. Primary Care. She

highlighted the council's support of children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and the clarity in communications as to how this funding could be accessed. She informed members that although the GCCG had been mandated to redeploy people at the start of the pandemic safeguarding posts had not been redeployed; these posts were seen as a priority. She explained that staff employed in universal services had been redeployed and she had been concerned as to the impact of this measure.

- 3.11 During the second wave the picture in primary care changed with GPs and EDs becoming busier than ever; this was due to clear messages in the media that primary care was open.
- 3.12 Staff who had been shielding due to their own vulnerabilities had been utilised to contact those most vulnerable in the population to identify need, and ensured that they had their eyes and ears open to any indications of abuse within the family setting.
- 3.13 The committee was reminded that under the new Working Together arrangements that SCRs had been replaced by rapid reviews, which had to report to the DfE within 15 days; this would be a partnership discussion over a two hour period considering what do we know about this case, what do we understand? Members were informed that there was now better representation on the safeguarding sub-groups, and the new working arrangements meant that the GSCE was better able to galvanise the learning opportunities.
- 3.14 In response to questions Detective Superintendent Mathieson informed members that the partnership was working together well. He did feel that activity was more vibrant at the strategic level than the operational level. He agreed that the sub groups were working well and were well attended and productive. He explained that the GSCE did look at how to build trust across the partnership, and was actively looking at how to broaden relationships. Policies and procedures were in place to enable effective sharing of information. He acknowledged that there was work still to be done with regard to culture, attitudes and behaviour. This aspect was harder to unpick but conversations were being undertaken.
- 3.15 The committee was informed that the Police had established a training facility at the newly opened Sabrina Centre in Berkeley. This was a national accredited programme; any officer that wished to specialise in specific areas would be able to do so. It was acknowledged that Covid-19 had impacted on training opportunities this year; the service did aim for the highest levels of professionalism.
- 3.16 The DCS stated that there was an emerging parity between the three services with regard to safeguarding, with a growing respect across the partnership. This was a maturing partnership which would continue to be strengthened through good communication, and embedding good practice.
- 3.17 It was explained that the S11 audit, which assessed the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements, was looking at what and where were the 'blockers' in practice, what was impacting on good practice, what did activity look like at ground level, eg. discharge pathways.
- 3.18 It was acknowledged that it was important to hear from young people about their experience and whether it reflected what was expected. The Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People shared their experiences of some services and feedback received through their work with young people. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Ambassadors to engage with this work.

ACTION: Lyn Green

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

- 3.19 It was commented that for many children and young people bullying in school remained a significant issue. It was acknowledged that in some aspects the Covid-19 pandemic had helped these young people as when they did return to the school setting they could be in a smaller bubble. However the additional pressures of the pandemic meant that teaching staff were under increasing pressure which presented challenges in terms of their ability to police these situations.
- 3.20 In response to a question it was acknowledged that more work was needed to ensure that there was a clear understanding of thresholds across all agencies. It was also explained that it was the duty of the referrer to follow up any referral made to the MASH.
- 3.21 It was commented that it was good to see from the report that the emphasis was more on changing the outcome rather than being too focused on the process.
- 3.22 Members agreed that it was important to ensure that children and young people were listened to; it was dangerous to make assumptions about what people needed. This was acknowledged and member's attention was drawn to an important piece of work by the Ambassadors on the language that cares, and how this demonstrated to professionals what it was like to read your file and see that you have not been listened to; how this could impact on a young person.
- 3.23 One of the Ambassadors present shared their experience of not being listened to at school when they had raised safeguarding concerns with a teacher. Mr Crompton informed the meeting that this should not happen; training was delivered by the GSCE to schools. All secondary schools must have a designated safeguarding lead, and in the primary sector it was the Headteacher. However it did also come back to culture and attitudes, and having said it should not happen he could not guarantee that it would not happen again. There was still work to be done across all settings.
- 3.24 The committee discussed the potential for safeguarding training to be made mandatory for all councillors. It was acknowledged that this had been tried before and had not succeeded. Members agreed that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility. It was agreed that this was something that might be better discussed at the Corporate Parenting Board.
ACTION: Andrea Clarke
- 3.25 It was noted that the current training requirements were that the Designated Safeguarding Leads must be trained, but did not require that Headteachers undertook safeguarding training. Members agreed that Headteachers should be included in this cohort. The DCS commented that it was good that training was valued. The problem was the landscape, the different settings, and that training was not mandatory; the DfE would have to take action for this training to be mandatory.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.35 pm