

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 16 May 2024 commencing at 10.00 am at the Committee Room - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Linda Cohen (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington
Cllr Dr David Drew	Cllr Paul McLain
Cllr Ben Evans	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller (Chair)
Cllr Beki Hoyland	Cllr Emma Nelson

Substitutes:

Apologies: Charlotte Blanch, Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People and Cllr Kathy Williams

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Dr Andrew Miller declared an interest as a foster carer for Gloucestershire County Council (GCC).

4. UPDATE ON THE LOCAL CHILD SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE REVIEW - CHILD X REPORT

- 4.1 Ann James, Executive Director of Children's Services, presented the report, which had been produced in response to a recommendation from full Council, at its meeting on 20 March 2024, for the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the request for a scrutiny task group to review the issues raised in the Child X Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) Report.
- 4.2 The report provided the context for the safeguarding arrangements for Gloucestershire, and an overview of the Child X LCSPR and resulting multi-agency action plan.
- 4.3 The report recommended that Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received twice yearly reports and briefings by the Executive Director of

Children's Services, supported by the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (GSCP) Business Manager, regarding the number, detail, progress and learning from any GSCP local learning review, rapid review or LCSPR. These would be held in closed session to prevent the identification of any children involved.

- 4.4 The concern raised by members that they were not given prior notice of the publication of the Child X LCSPR was recognised. Members were assured that arrangements were being put in place to ensure members received advance notification of the publication of LCSPRs going forward.
- 4.5 Ann James assured members that partners were embedding the learning from the safeguarding practice reviews and were progressing the resulting action plans. She highlighted that many of the themes raised by the rapid reviews and LCSPRs were not unique to Gloucestershire and reflected the complexities of looking after children presenting with traumatised behaviour against an inadequate care market.
- 4.6 Members were advised that the GSCP and its Executive was overseen, challenged, and held to account by an independent scrutineer.
- 4.7 Ann James welcomed the opportunity to share learning and progress with members, and welcomed the support and challenge members could provide in addressing learning from any safeguarding practice reviews going forward.
- 4.8 Attention was drawn to the recommendations resulting from the Child X LCSPR which had been included as an appendix to the report. The GSCP Executive would oversee its implementation and receive regular updates on progress.
- 4.9 A member queried the target date for completion of action 3.1 of the Child X LCSPR action plan. This would be clarified following the meeting.

ACTION – Ann James

- 4.10 A member expressed the view that twice yearly briefings would not be sufficient to address the issues raised and supported the establishment of scrutiny task group. They emphasised that the task group should involve members outside of this Committee, as well as the importance of members taking the issues raised seriously. They proposed that the task group should have a wider remit to address the implications relating to the risk register, as well as relating to commissioning.
- 4.11 Ann James advised the Committee that LCSPRs were relatively rare occurrences and reiterated the value of the Committee receiving the proposed twice yearly briefings, which would provide a broader overview of serious incidents and provide members with the opportunity to scrutinise progress against any recommendations. Additionally, she explained that a number of workstreams on priority areas were being established under the Corporate Parenting Group, of which some would

address the challenges identified in the Child X LCSPR. These workstreams would be led and championed by members.

- 4.12 It was added that the issues raised relating to commissioning were specific to safeguarding and standard operating procedures which were contained within the Children's remit.
- 4.13 A member proposed that the Child X LCSPR action plan be reviewed at a future Committee meeting.

ACTION – Laura Powick/ Ann James

- 4.14 Several members highlighted their dissatisfaction at first hearing about the publication of the Child X LCSPR in the press, having not received prior notification from the Council. Ann James acknowledged that they had got their communications wrong and advised that this would be rectified going forward.
- 4.15 The Committee discussed what the purpose and specific objectives of any proposed scrutiny task group would be, and what value it would add above the twice yearly briefings proposed in the report and the workstreams being developed by the Corporate Parenting Group.
- 4.16 One member cautioned against overreacting about a one-off incident and of overanalysing the issue. A further member concurred that members were not the professionals and that their job as scrutiny members was to hold the officers to account.
- 4.17 A member proposed that there be a one-off meeting to identify a clear protocol for communicating to members. They emphasised the importance of officers being able to trust members with information that has been provided in confidence. They added that serious cases were not that irregular, citing that 25 rapid reviews had taken place according to the report.
- 4.18 Ann James clarified that the 25 rapid reviews had taken place over a 4-year period and were about quick learning. Within the same period, only 4 LCSPRs had taken place.
- 4.19 Ann James also explained that they had been working with the Communications Team to develop a protocol for informing members. This could be circulated with Committee members via email and could be discussed at a future meeting if required.

ACTION – Ann James

- 4.20 The relationship between this protocol and the work undertaken by Rob Ayliffe, Director of Policy, Performance and Governance, on member and officer

communications, was queried. In response, it was understood that the protocol being referred to here was specific to Children's Services.

- 4.21 A member stated that a scrutiny task group should also consider the member communications protocol. They reemphasised that members needed to take their responsibility as Corporate Parents seriously by establishing a task group where members directed the agenda.
- 4.22 Another member agreed that the issues raised were important, however they were unclear of the additional value of a broader task group, adding that the recommendations from the Child X LCSPR could be monitored adequately by this Committee.
- 4.23 In response to a query, it was confirmed that the issues raised relating to commissioning and the risk register by the Child X LCSPR did fall within the remit of Children's Services.
- 4.24 Ann James proposed that she would be happy to liaise with Rob Ayliffe on the work he was doing on member and officer communications, to ensure the protocol being developed within Children's Services aligned with wider protocols.

ACTION – Ann James

- 4.25 Ann James clarified that the issues raised through rapid reviews and LCSPRs were not just specifically related to corporate parenting but were about safeguarding children.
- 4.26 Paul Shallcross, Director of Safeguarding and Care, echoed the importance of communicating effectively with members. He also reiterated the benefits of the proposed twice yearly briefings, which would enable members to have oversight of safeguarding themes and issues over a longer period of time.
- 4.27 A member queried the role of councillors in safeguarding matters. It was explained that whilst members did not have a formal role as part of the safeguarding system, they were involved informally through their roles within the community. It was proposed that a briefing be organised for all members regarding their role in safeguarding.

ACTION – Laura Powick/ Ann James

- 4.28 Members were informed that officers needed to be provided with consent from constituents stating that they were happy for the member to share and receive their personal information.
- 4.29 A member suggested that all councillors should receive training on safeguarding as part of the member induction process.

ACTION – Democratic Services

- 4.30 The proposal for a task group to consider the issues raised by the Child X LCSPR was put to the vote. Four members voted for the establishment of a task group and four members voted against. Following the use of the Chair's casting vote, a task group would not be established.
- 4.31 Arrangements for the delivery of the twice yearly briefings would be considered under the work plan item.

5. YOUTH WORK IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

- 5.1 Ann James introduced the report which provided an overview of GCC's duties in relation to the provision of youth work; an overview of the delivery of youth work by the Council as part of its commissioned youth support provision; an outline of the current tender process for Council commissioned youth support services; and plans for the future, including the development of the 'One Plan for Children and Young People in Gloucestershire.'
- 5.2 Members were informed that the Council was currently in the process of retendering for its youth services, which would be delivered through a hub and spoke model comprising a county wide lot covering statutory service elements, alongside 3 locality lots.
- 5.3 This inclusive approach to youth services would sit alongside the family hub model, providing a 'universal front door' for all to use, with targeted elements sitting behind it.
- 5.4 The importance of youth services was recognised, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Research highlighted the importance of youth work and services in terms of developing safe communities and developing the skills in young people to be able to take part in society as they moved on into adulthood.
- 5.5 It was acknowledged that the Council did not know enough about the youth services which were being provided on a voluntary basis across the County. Mapping of current voluntary provision would be carried out to enable the Council to build and develop its youth offer.
- 5.6 Members were also informed of the importance of coproducing services with families and children and young people.
- 5.7 It was noted that a youth strategy would be developed with the sector and young people which would set out the Council's plans for youth work and services, including how partners would work together to deliver an accessible offer across Gloucestershire.

- 5.8 Cllr David Drew declared a personal interest as a volunteer for The Door youth charity in Stroud. Cllr Dr Andrew Miller also declared a personal interest as a volunteer for Abbey Church in Gloucester.
- 5.9 A member asked when the tender process would be finalised, raising a concern that the current contract would be ending soon. In response, it was explained that Gloucestershire was unique in that it delivered its youth justice services through an outsourced arrangement, which limited the market. The evaluation period had been extended to enable providers to submit evidence on their capacity and experience in delivering for the most vulnerable children in the County. However, staff who were delivering for the County's children and were experienced in their field could be reassured that they would be supported.
- 5.10 Following a query, Verona Crossfield, Commissioning, provided further clarification on the model for youth services provision going forward.
- 5.11 It was confirmed that preliminary conversations were being held relating to Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) Regulations.
- 5.12 One member praised the report but challenged that the Council was behind the curve in harnessing the work being delivered by the voluntary sector.
- 5.13 One member asked about the location of the locality hubs, citing the difficulty some families in rural areas would have in accessing these. In response, it was explained that whilst the youth offer would be provided mainly through the 'universal front door', there would also be a strong targeted focus which could include providers going out to more rural locations to work with children and young people.
- 5.14 There was a further member query as to how the Council would support current voluntary providers, and how they would link with the hubs. In response, members were informed that the providers in the localities would be tasked with a mapping exercise to look at what was already available and to build relationships with voluntary organisations. This would enable voluntary providers to find out about funding and resources. This information could also be shared by members and through other means, such as local newsletters.
- 5.15 A member commented that in principle, plans for the delivery of youth services going forward were encouraging, however queried how the mapping exercise and engagement with the voluntary sector would be managed, expressing concern over the scale and cost of the work involved.
- 5.16 Officers recognised the significant scale of the work involved. It was noted that members had been invited to an event looking at the development of the One Plan in the summer. It was also noted that the Chief Executive at Young Gloucestershire had been working hard to mobilise the voluntary sector, with more than 60

providers contributing to the development of the plan, and that proposals for a youth strategy had resulted from those conversations. Whilst there was limited funding and resources available, the ambition was to start having those conversations with the voluntary sector about working in a more collaborative, efficient way. This alignment in the delivery of services would then improve opportunities to secure central funding going forward.

- 5.17 A member commented that parish and town councils often funded their own youth provision and asked about the Council's relationship with them. In response it was explained that the successful provider would be expected to work closely with parish and town councils.
- 5.18 The member also asked about the benefits of outsourcing youth justice services and whether any thought had been given to bringing those services back in house. A response to this question would be circulated to Committee members following the meeting.

ACTION – Ann James

- 5.19 In response to a question regarding the delivery of specialist provisions, it was explained that the focus was on delivering services in the broadest sense and making adaptations for special needs. The importance of providing inclusive services, such as for people who were neurodiverse, was recognised, and it was understood that this had been included within the specification as part of the tender process. Further conversations would need to be held with the successful provider on what the delivery of specialist provisions would look like.
- 5.20 It was requested that once a provider had been confirmed, that they be invited to attend a future Committee meeting to discuss the provision of specialist youth services.

ACTION – Laura Powick

6. REVIEW OF CARE FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

- 6.1 Julie Miles, Assistant Director for Children and Families East, and Naomi Adams, Head of Service for Disabled Children, provided an update on the remodelling and transformation of the disabled children's service.
- 6.2 It was noted that the Council had made significant investment into the service. The funding had been confirmed as permanent from this year, to enable the service to grow, to deliver essential care packages, and provide uplifts in direct payments.
- 6.3 Generally, children with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) or who attended a special school used the service, which included short break provision at

Hartwood House for 8- to 18-year-olds and through the family link service for children under the age of 8.

- 6.4 The service was currently being remodelled to ensure that children worked with the same social worker throughout their journey. The service worked alongside multi-agencies regularly to support the children.
- 6.5 The service was being remodelled in coproduction with the families using the service and would be based on the vision of the right service for the right child, first time, every time. It was noted that the recent SEND inspection had commented on the shared vision of service leaders, recognising the ambitious strategic plans which were designed to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in Gloucestershire.
- 6.6 It was explained that the service was being remodelled to ensure that it was inclusive, accessible, and able to meet demand. Currently 400 children were using the service. The new structure of the service would include 3 social worker teams and 3 early help teams. There would be two posts in the front door service to support families in accessing disabled children's services. A role for a specialist social worker was being developed, as well as for two direct payment workers. It was hoped that the new structure would increase capacity, improve the quality of support provided, and reduce the number of complaints from families, some of which were dissatisfied with the number of hoops they currently had to jump through to access the service.
- 6.7 In terms of progress so far, a big recruitment drive had been undertaken to recruit to the new team structure, and weekly consultation meetings were being held with the wider children and families' teams on assessments for disabled children.
- 6.8 Next steps included developing the scope of the front door positions and improving the capacity for short breaks to meet demand.
- 6.9 Cllr Paul McLain declared a personal interest as a previous foster carer for children with life limiting and complex needs and for previously providing short breaks for GCC.
- 6.10 In response to a query relating to the transition of service users from children to adult services, it was explained that a good transition process was in place, and that conversations were held with adult services about children from the age of 14 to ensure they were aware of their needs.
- 6.11 Following a query, clarification was provided on the role of the direct payment workers.
- 6.12 One member asked officers whether they envisaged the service relying on agency workers. In response, members were advised that recruitment to the new structure

was going well. The one current agency worker employed by the service would move on once the new social workers had started and were comfortable.

- 6.13 The member further asked about the pressure of a potential increase in EHCPs on schools, and the impact this might have on the relationship between schools and social workers. In response, it was explained that the focus was on joined up working through multi-agencies and on providing support and guidance for families regardless of where they sat within the system.
- 6.14 In response to a query relating to the accessibility of the service, it was explained that the service offer had been coproduced through the Parent Carer Forum.
- 6.15 There was a query relating to home to school transport for disabled children. It was noted that the service was currently under review in partnership with an external contractor to ensure the most effective and sustainable home to school transport arrangements for these children, and all children.
- 6.16 In response to a further query about the quality of service provided by home to school transport providers, it was understood that whilst the review was working to review all the key areas of home to school transport provision, all transport providers were subject to issues outside of their control, such as traffic, weather conditions and unforeseen delays from other earlier users of the transport, when providing their service.

7. QUARTER 3 2023/24 PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 7.1 The Quarter 3 2023/24 Performance Report was taken as read.
- 7.2 One member expressed concern regarding the increasing number of permanent exclusions from schools, and the impact on the life options for excluded children.
- 7.3 In response, Kirsten Harrison, Director of Education, advised members that there were a wide number of factors contributing to the increase in permanent exclusions, including changes in social attitudes and behaviours post-pandemic, funding pressures within schools which have often resulted in cuts to pastoral care and support staff, and increasing mental health and social and emotional needs amongst children and young people. It was noted that some behavioural management practices that had worked previously were proving less effective given the social changes post-pandemic, and schools were reviewing their behaviour management approaches. In the case of permanent exclusions, despite their best efforts, they were increasingly reaching the point where they had to balance the needs of the majority against the individual child, leading to an increased number of permanent exclusions. The best way to address the issue would be having the services and resources to intervene at the earliest opportunity, however this was difficult to undertake when resources were pressured and were currently still taken up by demand at the higher ends of the system.

- 7.4 In response to a further query, it was understood that at a national level, focus was being given to SEND and attendance.
- 7.5 A member added that there was evidence that parent and school relationships had also broken down in more cases post pandemic, which was exacerbating the problem.

8. WORK PLAN

- 8.1 The Committee's Work Plan to be updated as follows:
- An update on progress against the actions from the Child X LCSPR to be added to the agenda for the meeting on 7 November 2024.
 - An update on permanent exclusions to be included as part of the update on school attendance scheduled for the meeting on 7 November 2024.
 - The Fostering Annual Report to be received at the meeting in January 2025.
 - An item on Academisation, including the impact on and the role of the Local Authority, would be included on the agenda for the March 2025 meeting.
 - The Bright Spots Survey Results to be presented at the March 2025 meeting.
 - A presentation on specialist youth provision from the new youth services provider to be included on the agenda for March 2025.
 - An item on Child Safety Online, including an overview of the issues and how they can be addressed, to be included on the agenda for the January 2025 meeting.
 - An item on Child Friendly Gloucestershire to also be included on the agenda for January 2025.
 - The second part of meeting on 7 November 2024 to be held in exempt session for the Committee to receive the first of the twice yearly private briefings on GSCP local learning reviews, rapid reviews and LCSPRs.

9. FUTURE MEETINGS

- 9.1 The Committee thanked Becca Rogers, the Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People, for her time on this Committee.
- 9.2 Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington was also thanked for his work on the Committee as he would be taking up a position on Adults Social Care and Communities Scrutiny Committee instead.
- 9.3 The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

CHAIRPERSON

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

Meeting concluded at 12.40 pm

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