

## **Children and Young People's Services Select Committee**

19 June 2019 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr High (Chairman)

Mrs Russell	Mrs Hall	Ms Sudan
Mrs Bennett	Mrs Jones	Mr Lozzi
Ms Flynn	Ms Lord	Mr Cristin

Apologies were received from Mrs Bridges, Mr Cloake, Mr Wickremaratchi and Mrs Ryan

Absent: Mr Petts

Also in attendance: Ms Goldsmith and Mrs Pendleton

### **Part I**

#### **10. Declarations of Interests**

10.1 The following personal interests were declared:

- Mr High declared an interest in item 5 (Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care: Implications for Scrutiny) as a member of his family has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- Mrs Flynn declared an interest in item 5 (Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care: Implications for Scrutiny) as a member of her family has Special Educational Needs (SEN), and as a governor at Ingfield Manor School.

#### **11. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee**

11.1 Resolved that the minutes of the last meeting held on 15 May 2019 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

#### **12. Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

12.1 The Committee considered a tabled paper which was a new version of the Forward Plan dated 17 June 2019 (copy appended to the signed minutes). This version of the Forward Plan was not included in the Committee papers as it had been published following the statutory despatch of the agenda.

12.2 John Readman, Director of Children's Services, advised the Adoption of an Improvement Plan for Children's Services decision would now be taken in July, instead of June.

12.3 Resolved – that the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

### **13. Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care: Implications for Scrutiny**

13.1 The Chairman invited the Committee to reflect upon the Ofsted findings that scrutiny had not been sufficiently rigorous, and to identify any specific changes required to address this going forward. The following points were raised by members in discussion:

- The Committee had been quite focussed on decision points and data, and had not been so open-minded about occurrences in the service more broadly. Members proposed it would be useful to undertake visits to operational sites, such as IPEH hubs, to enable a more 'on the ground' source of information.
- Members noted that Education had a number of co-opted representatives on the Committee, and considered the absence of a perspective from Children's Social Care. Members considered a practitioner representative would bring a valuable voice to the Committee, and assist in understanding the issues identified by Ofsted more clearly.
- Members suggested the BPG should plan the scrutiny timetable for the next couple of years to provide a clear programme of topics.
- The Committee heard that the Children in Care Council (CiCC) issue a periodical newsletter and suggested they could be added to the distribution list.
- The Chairman advised he felt there would be value in talking to social workers and practitioners in order to understand their experiences and identify successes and failures in the service.
- The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) advised she was aiming to involve children, carers and various agencies and partners in the panel meetings. The Committee noted there were 2 members who sat on both the CYPSSC and CPP.
- The Leader reflected on a visit to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. The MASH was operating well, and it gave the Leader and Cabinet Member the opportunity to see what good looked like. The Leader added that members should visit other service areas, that staff welcome the recognition and a forum to listen and be heard.
- Members agreed and considered they all had an individual responsibility to engage with the service. It was suggested visits to local Children and Family Centres were useful to understand the interaction between different agencies. Observing foster or adoption panels was also considered as a value forum to gain further insight into the service.
- The Chairman of the CPP urged members to consider how they approach schools about CLA, including asking them if they had CLA, and how were they getting on. The Director of Children's Services agreed, and suggested members take opportunities to exercise their role as corporate parents when meeting chairs of governors and heads. The Chairman of the CPP encouraged members to feedback from these discussions in order to close the loop.

- The Chairman advised the member day would be a prime opportunity to stress the corporate parenting responsibility to members, encouraging them to ask questions and strive for good outcomes as advocates for children.
- Members of the Committee advised they needed to know when things were going wrong, and felt that loops could be closed by both reaching out and being available.
- The Committee considered the way in which they receive and understand data and key measures required refreshment. The Committee also agreed members should be flexible in terms of meeting dates, in order that they are getting the opportunities to provide the most effective input, in view of the quarterly monitoring visits from Ofsted.

### 13.2 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Works with the service to identify possible visits and witnesses for future meetings, and that individual members look at what engagement they can undertake, such as observing a fostering or adoption panel.
2. Considers the wider involvement of co-optees from Children's Social Care, potentially including social workers, care leavers and the Youth Cabinet.
3. Receives relevant information from the service, such as the CiCC newsletter.
4. Has close communication with the CPP to ensure members are working together and cross-cutting issues and being considered in the most appropriate space.
5. Considers information from other councils on what 'good scrutiny' and good Children's Social Care looks like.
6. Asks the Leader and Cabinet Member to investigate the involvement of young people, including the Youth Cabinet, as part of the Select Committee.
7. Encourages members to find a mechanism to ensure that families and young people feel confident to approach County Councillors, and that the council ensures messaging to the public regarding corporate parenting is clear.
8. Considers what data and key measures are required for more effective and robust scrutiny.
9. Looks at future meeting dates at the next BPG to ensure effective scrutiny of the Children First Practice Improvement Plan.

## **14. Children First Practice Improvement Plan**

14.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children Services and the Director of Law and Assurance. The report was introduced by John Readman, Director of Children Services, who also took the Committee through a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes). The Committee heard the following key points:

- A commissioner had now been appointed for WSCC; John Coughlan, Chief Executive of Hampshire County Council. A set up meeting had taken place which had been very useful. Hampshire Children's Social Care had recently been awarded an Outstanding Ofsted rating. The practical support from Hampshire County Council was funded by the Department for Education (DfE).
- The commissioner would undertake a three month review of Children's Social Care, then a formal report would be submitted to the DfE at the end of September. WSCC would work with the commissioner to develop and undertake improvement, including working with the Improvement Board, the CYPSSC and CPP.
- There was a fundamental determination and commitment to improve the service through three concurrent streams:
  - Looking at areas of most risk and making early progress
  - Supporting and stabilising the workforce
  - The development of the Improvement Plan.

14.2 Sarah Daly, Head of Children's Social Care provided an update on progress to date. Key points included the following:

- To improve management oversight, supervision training had started to take place in order to build practitioner confidence and embed a good working practice.
- Live time trackers for individual children had been developed.
- Social workers for pre-birth work were now embedded in their work, visiting and reviewing cases, ensuring there were plans in place by week 32 gestation. A consistent monitoring approach had been taken to ensure a wrap-around care plan.
- The West Sussex Safeguarding Children's Board (WSSCB) had been working in partnership with Children's Social Care to strengthen the focus on neglect. Neglect cases were being audited, and learning was coming out of this.
- Practice improvement had been underway in areas of high risk adolescents, return home interviews, child exploitation, foster to adopt and assessment and intervention.

14.3 The Director of Children's Services provided the following update on workforce:

- Vacancies were being filled in a timely and efficient way, and the vacancy gap was reducing.
- The aim was to develop the best environment to encourage best practice, with positive learning and development opportunities.
- The recruitment and retention campaign was yielding good results, with the lowest vacancy rate in a significant period of time.
- Morale in the service had improved, which was critical when bringing new staff in.
- 7 apprenticeships were in train, and the AYSE was proving a successful academy programme. In September 2019 an additional 43 full time equivalent posts would join the workforce.

- Around 12% of the workforce was covered by agency staff who would remain with WSCC until they were no longer needed.
- There were 24 leavers in the pipeline citing reasons of relocation as opposed to high caseloads or poor management oversight.
- The retention programme had an 82% take up to date.
- Human Resources data was available each month, this oversight enabled trends to be identified and allowed for action to be taken where necessary.
- Staff events had been well attended, and a good opportunity for staff to have an open discussion about their views.

14.4 Members of the Committee asked the following questions regarding the workforce update:

- The Chairman questioned if high case loads were the primary reason for social workers leaving. The Head of Children's Social Care advised that when caseloads were running at levels of around 30 this was the biggest contributing factor for staff choosing to leave. She added this was far too high, and the caseloads were returning to a much more desirable and manageable level.
- Members were pleased to hear of the additional establishment of social workers in September, and asked for the number of those who were newly qualified. The Head of Children's Social Care advised 37 social workers were joining the AYSE academy.
- Members noted that sustainability must be managed in order to retain these staff, and questioned what promotion opportunities existed for those at middle-management level. The Head of Children's Social Care advised there was a progression route and that the service did recognise talent. Where social workers identified specific interests these were nurtured, staff were encouraged to stay with WSCC and were provided opportunities to transfer within the service to further develop skills. Progression options included becoming an advanced practitioner, frontline management and senior level management.
- The Committee considered if agency workers were offered to become permanent staff for WSCC. The Head of Children's Social Care advised members that agency staff were given the opportunity to transfer to WSCC as permanent staff and a number had done so. This was an indication that the culture and environment for staff was improving.

14.5 The Director of Children's Services provided an update to the Committee on improvement planning. Members heard the following key points:

- There was now an opportunity to refresh the wider West Sussex Plan in relation to children. Outcomes of the Integrated Prevention and Early Help (IPEH) review would also be weaved into this revived version of the West Sussex Plan in relation to giving Children and Young People the best start in life.

- The Improvement Plan would be set against the 12 recommendations from Ofsted. The Plan was in development following consultation with staff following the engagement events.
- Getting the plan right was absolutely key, it was a lengthy process but progress was being made.
- The question 'what does good look like?' was central to the development of the Improvement Plan, with consideration for governance, actions, outcomes and evidence.
- The plan aimed to capture the breadth of corporate parenting.
- It was crucial the format of the plan was able to be understood by staff in the service. Frontline staff would deliver the improvement required.
- The service welcomed both scrutiny and support of the plans implementation.

14.6 Members of the Committee were grateful for the update on the improvement journey, and felt reassured by the vigour of work underway. The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Chairman noted a stable and effective social worker cohort was vital for improvement.
- The Committee asked officers how they would know if the service had missed something. The Director of Children's Services advised that with intervention by a commissioner there was formal level of experienced support. He felt there was a collective focus for improvement and noted the cultivation of a relentless effort to make positive change.
- The Leader advised WSCC was a difficult place to recruit to given the low rate of unemployment, costly house prices and being situated between 2 outstanding councils. She added her commitment along with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to the improvement of the service.
- The Chairman advised he felt reassured that WSCC was travelling in the right direction.

14.7 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Notes the process for the production and delivery of the Children First Practice Improvement Plan, the progress to date and the further actions in hand.
2. Considers how it proposes to discharge its scrutiny function in relation to the delivery of the plan.

## **15. Local Safeguarding Children Partnership**

15.1 The Committee considered a report by the Independent Chair of the West Sussex Safeguarding Children's Board (WSSCB). The report was introduced by Jon Brydon, Head of Safeguarding, who highlighted the following key points:

- The Head of Safeguarding was working with the Independent Chair of the WSSCB and colleagues in police and health to implement a change in national policy which replaces the current operating model of the safeguarding board.
- In 2016, a review was undertaken which highlighted the inefficiencies of the current model, recommending that it was refreshed.
- The new Local Safeguarding Partnership (LSCP) will replace the WSSCB as a stronger statutory partnership between the local authority, the police and health on an equal footing.
- The key changes involve the cessation of the Child Death Overview Panel will be delivered by a Pan Sussex steering group. Serious Case Reviews would be included in a new National Review Panel.
- The WSSCB was currently independently chaired. In the new LSCP arrangement, the Chairman will take an active scrutiny role.
- The priorities for the LSCP would be known after the August meeting of the new partnership. This would form the focus of work for the next 3 years.

15.2 The Committee considered the following points in discussion:

- Members welcomed the new arrangement and understood the rationale in bringing together key partners.
- Members considered the shared accountability, and how the new partnership would be delivered in practical terms. The Director of Children's Services advised the new government legislation assured the effective scrutiny of practice and standards. As an assurance body, the LSCP would hold WSCC, the police, health and voluntary sector colleagues to account.
- The Vice-Chairman considered the risk management implications and asked how the Chairman of the LSCP would be appraised. The Director of Children's Services advised national guidance did not determine an appraisal system, however the Chairman would meet the Chief Executive of WSCC on a monthly basis. The Director of Children's Services added that the Chairman of the LSCP was also a member of the Improvement Board.

15.3 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Notes the changes to multi-agency arrangements to safeguard children in local authority areas.
2. Requests that further information on the new priorities for the LSCP brought to an appropriate meeting of the Committee after 6 August 2019.

## **16. Business Planning Group Appointments**

16.1 Resolved - that the Committee agreed the membership of the Business Planning Group would comprise Mr High (Chairman), Mrs Russell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Hall, Ms Sudan and Ms Lord.

## **17. Requests for Call-In**

17.1 The Children and Young People's Services Select Committee Business Planning Group (BPG) received a request to call-in the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People concerning the Relinquishment of the Beechfield Secure Unit (CYP01 19/20) – decision published on 22 May 2019. The BPG declined the request.

## **18. Date of Next Meeting**

18.1 The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 17 July 2019 at 14.00pm at County Hall, Chichester. This was an additional scheduled meeting in agreement with the Chairman so that the Committee may consider the Children First Practice Improvement Plan.

The meeting ended at 12.58 pm

Chairman