

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

4 March 2020 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present:

Ms Lord
Mr Baldwin
Mrs Burgess
Ms Flynn

Mrs Hall
Mr Hillier
Mrs Jones
Mr Lea

Mr Lozzi
Mrs Roberts

Apologies were received from Mrs Bridges, Ms Sudan, Mr Wickremaratchi, Mrs Ryan and Mr Cristin

Also in attendance: Mrs Russell, Mr Jupp and Mr Marshall

Part I

63. Declarations of Interests

63.1 No interests were declared.

64. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

64.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

65. Responses to Recommendations

65.1 The Committee considered a response to the recommendation made at the 4 December 2019 meeting from Nigel Jupp, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. The Committee heard the following:

- Following agreement at County Council to allocate £20m to the Woodlands Meed project over the next 4 years, £500k would be invested to explore designs and options over the coming months.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills had met governors and the head about how the project would proceed.
- Project Board meetings would be held at the college comprising the project team, governors, head, architects and consultants. These meetings would be chaired by Andrew Edwards, Director of Property and Assets.

65.2 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills answered some questions raised at the Central and South Mid Sussex CLC held on 3 March:

1. Why has the decision been pushed back to May? The Cabinet Member advised that as with all decisions, Woodlands Meed was

subject to an approved business case which would be worked up over the coming months. There were democratic processes to be adhered to.

2. Can there be a milestone plan or timeline to measure progress? Regular updates would be provided to CYPSSC and the relevant CLC and further detail would emerge over the coming months.
3. Plans should think of the future and the 100 pupil capacity should be reviewed. The Director of Education and Skills advised SEND strategy which had just been published considered the needs of the authority now and into the future. There was a broader range of provision for post-16 children and this should be made better use of. 100 pupil places was sufficient.
4. A critical path analysis was required. The Director of Property and Assets, who advised they were not yet in a position to publish a programme with some outstanding issues to be resolved.
5. Can the scheduled date of opening be brought forward? 2023 remained the date for completion, the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills advised he hoped it could be delivered on time and on budget.
6. What are the contingencies if Woodland Mead cannot progress? The ambition is to progress with option 1, alternatives will be considered if required. There were some difficulties with regards to access to the site, discussions were ongoing with third parties to try and resolve this.
7. Will the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills attend the next Central and South Mid Sussex CLC on 15 June 2020? The Cabinet Member confirmed he would attend the CLC on 15 June 2020.

65.3 Resolved – that the Committee recommends the Director of Property and Assets apply for consent to Sport England and that the Committee receive a copy of this letter.

66. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

66.1 The Committee considered a tabled paper which was a new version of the Forward Plan dated 2 March 2020 (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.

67.2 Resolved that the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

67. Children First Improvement Update

67.2 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning. The report was introduced by Jacquie Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People who provided an update on the happenings in the service and the upcoming work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Lindsey Hannant, Head of Resourcing Organisational Development and Talent, gave the following update on the workforce:

- There had been a spike in leavers in February 2020 including agency staff leading to an increase in the uncovered vacancy gap

(which doesn't take into account absences from those on career break, long-term sickness or maternity leave).

- The service were receiving fewer applications, those that were received were significantly lower from the UK and more from overseas based social workers.
- Human Resources (HR) were taking action to ensure the uncovered vacancy gap didn't continue to increase, hoping it would stabilise at around 4 or 5%.
- Exit interviews were offered to all social workers, between July 2019 and February 2020, of those offered, 16 accepted the interview.
- The exit interviews identified three main reasons for leaving:
 - Dissatisfaction with the job, including workloads, environment, processes and challenge and support.
 - Personal reasons
 - Location/geography.
- The service and HR have been working collaboratively to address the dissatisfaction element of leavers through looking at embedding better practice with personal supervision. January 2020 data identified that 94% of the workforce had personal supervision.

67.3 Lisa Reid, Senior Improvement Lead, gave an update on the Quality Assurance (QA) Framework. The Committee heard the following:

- The QA Framework was currently being finalised to ensure robust social work practice.
- A range of methods to gather qualitative and quantitative data had been used. Review audits would be undertaken to identify learning and areas which need further consideration through thematic auditing.
- The service were seeking to update the Framework through a 'back to practice' model, which would give senior members and officers the opportunity to experience and reflect upon casework practice, feeding back into the learning and reviews.
- Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) support and oversee plans to ensure that operational arrangements were robust, arrangements for CLA were suitable, and escalated where necessary.
- Sophie Carter, Principal Manager for Safeguarding, advised that a practice week was scheduled for the end of March. Practice week focussed on the experience and journey of children in West Sussex. It was an opportunity to undertake collaborative audits, observe case meetings, Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and look at a cross-section of social work tasks.
- Jenny Brennan, Child Protection Advisor, advised that Child Protection conferences were an opportunity to scrutinise the quality of social work practice, and advisors were responsible for maintaining the quality of outcomes.

67.4 The Chairman welcomed questions from the Committee on the workforce and QA Framework. A summary of the main points from discussion were as follows:

- Members considered the stress and pressure on staff and the knock-on implications. The Head of Resourcing advised there were

ongoing discussions about ways to improve the culture and working environment, that staff needed visibility and access to leadership teams, and that a wellbeing pilot was underway via the NHS in which staff could come together in forums to discuss the emotional and social aspects of this type of work. Resilience and mindfulness training were available as was the employee assistance programme.

- The Committee considered what preventative measures were in place before children reached the care system to ease resource pressures on social workers, and whether WSCC were working with district and borough councils. The Cabinet Member advised as Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) that she was building on the multi-agency approach engaging district and borough colleagues and was having early discussions with a view to involving police on the CPP. The Cabinet Member also advised the Pause project (supportive interventions with very vulnerable young women at risk of multiple pregnancies) was a good example of outcome delivery through prevention. The Committee agreed this was a good initiative and should continue.
- Members asked how the service were sure the new QA Framework would be effective and how it was different to previous arrangements. The Senior Improvement Lead advised that with previous frameworks there had been less rigour and continuity owing to changes in senior personnel. The service had linked in with a regional safeguarding and QA group to enable external oversight for best practice.
- Members considered the vacancy rate and whether officers were concerned about staff asking to end and repay their retention package. The Head of Resourcing advised 22 enquiries had been received about repaying their package, 9 of which had converted to resignations. She added that HR had gone out to the marketplace to anticipate these departures and would be working with Lucy Butler, the new Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning to progress proposals to mitigate the risk.
- The Committee asked if WSCC's reputation was a barrier to recruitment success, and if case numbers were again increasing. The Committee heard that there was a lag effect in terms of reputation with the Commissioner report being published in December and the Ofsted rating for Children's Services did have a continued impact on WSCC's attractiveness as an employer. The current average caseload was 15.7 children per social worker, the highest was 29. Caseloads remained under review but were generally seen to be average and reasonable against national comparators.
- The Committee asked if all councils used the Mosaic system. The Senior Improvement Lead advised it was an integrated system used by other local authorities. The Leader advised work was ongoing to enable the use of Mosaic remotely.

67.5 Resolved – that the Committee recommends:

1. The Senior Improvement Lead considers how to facilitate member involvement in practice week.
2. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People invite CYPSSC members to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

3. It receives an update on the experience and outcomes of practice week, and,
4. It would like to see more child-focussed measures in future reports.

68. West Sussex Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report

68.1 The Committee considered a report by the Independent Chair of the West Sussex Safeguarding Children Board. The report was introduced by Lesley Walker, Independent Chair, who highlighted the following:

- The report spanned the period April 2018 to June 2019 as the last as a Board, and the first full year with Lesley Walker as the Chair. A new Partnership arrangement was established following this period and this replaced the Board.
- A key achievement of this reporting period included neglect work following the Ofsted report of February 2019. A neglect working group was established chaired by Lesley Walker involving different agencies which developed a robust action plan. This included listening to children with protection plans, a measured impact framework and deep dive conversations with practitioners and children.
- A further achievement included the development of the new statutory local safeguarding children partnership arrangements which comprised three lead partners: Sussex Police, Health (Clinical Commissioning Groups) and the Local Authority.

68.2 The Chairman welcomed questions from the Committee. A summary of the main discussion points were as follows:

- Members requested clarity on the tangible differences between the board and newly established partnership. The Independent Chair advised she now took on the role of scrutineer for the partnership, there was a new structure and the focus now aligned with local need. The previous board was more prescriptive however now there was the opportunity to think about and respond to local need.
- The Leader of WSCC advised the previous board was too larger group to give valuable direction. Now with three statutory partners, it was an equal partnership with shared responsibility.
- Members asked if the partnership included work with the community, including voluntary groups and BAME communities. The Independent Chair advised the partnership was aware of new and emerging threats of abuse and that issues were filtered through district and borough councils. The independent Chair agreed communities were the best eyes and ears, that partners were working with an exploitation sub-group which had community and voluntary sector representation. District and boroughs, agencies and organisations were also asked what action they were taking and where evidence was weak, were questioned and asked to provide action plans. There is greater clarity now for what local authorities need to report and what the impact was.
- The Committee considered the role of schools and identified them as a key engager with children and asked how the partnership ensured they could do this work? The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the Designated Safeguarding Leads

(DSLs) had felt unsupported and that this had been raised with the service. The Early Help offer would strengthen work with schools with more link workers, and there was a dedicated phoneline from schools to the MASH. The Independent Chair advised she was visiting the DSL school network to measure engagement. There was still work to do to embed both the roles of education providers and local authorities.

- The Committee asked how the public were informed of the partnership and its work. The Independent Chair advised there was a website, but there was work to do in West Sussex to raise awareness.
- Members asked how the voice of the child was being heard and acted upon. The Independent Chair advised this was vital and at the centre of the partnership. A shadow board of young people had been established which was shared with the Improvement Board. The shadow board were reflective and articulate.

68.3 Resolved – that the Committee recommend a session for all members on the Safeguarding partnership, with a focus on neglect work.

69. Business Planning Group Report

69.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Business Planning Group. The following point was raised:

- Members requested that when Early Help proposals were in place that a session take place on this. The Cabinet Member advised she was considering the best model for this to happen, but that members would be involved and sighted on the proposals.

69.2 The Chairman advised members that a one off TFG would be established to consider the Education and Skills Annual Report and requested volunteers to sit on this.

69.3 Resolved – that the Education and Skills Annual Report TFG would comprise: Kirsty Lord, Karen Sudan, Stephen Hillier and Hilary Flynn as Chairman.

70. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

70.1 The following subject was put forward for consideration by the Committee's Business Planning Group:

- IT in Children's Social Care.
- Appropriateness of placements for SEND children.

70.2 Resolved – that that Committee notes the report.

71. Requests for Call-In

71.1 Resolved – that that Committee notes the reasons for the rejection of the decision call-in request made in January 2020 relating to the reorganisation of rural and small schools in West Sussex.

72. Date of Next Meeting

72.1 The next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 April 2020, at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chairman