

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

17 July 2019 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee held at 2.00 pm at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr High (Chairman)

Mrs Russell	Mrs Hall	Mr Wickremaratchi
Mrs Bennett	Mrs Jones	Mr Lozzi
Mrs Bridges	Ms Lord	Maria Roberts
Ms Flynn	Ms Sudan	

Apologies were received from Mr Cloake, Mrs Ryan and Mr Cristin

Also in attendance: Mr Marshall, Ms Goldsmith, Mrs Pendleton

Part I

19. Declarations of Interests

19.1 The following personal interests were declared:

- Mr High declared an interest in item 5 (Adoption of an Improvement Plan for Children's Services) as a member of his family has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- Mrs Flynn declared an interest in item 5 (Adoption of an Improvement Plan for Children's Services) as a member of her family has Special Educational Needs (SEN).

20. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

20.1 Resolved that the minutes of the last meeting held on 19 June 2019 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

21. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

21.1 The Committee considered a tabled paper which was a new version of the Forward Plan dated 11 July 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.

21.2 Rachel Allan, Senior Advisor Democratic Services, advised that the Formation of a Regional Adoption Agency, Small Schools Assessment and SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2022 decisions would be previewed by the Committee in September.

21.3 Resolved – that the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

22. Adoption of an Improvement Plan for Children's Services

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Heather Daley, Director of Human Resources and Organisational Change, provided an update on the workforce of Children's Social Care. The Committee heard the following key points:

- The vacancy gap had reduced from 18.5% to 7%.
- 10% of the current workforce were agency staff. This would be held until caseloads reached the right level.
- There was a better view in the service of where the recruitment and caseload hotspots were, and a central record of full-time equivalent posts, vacancies and projections for leavers had been established.
- The average leavers per month had reduced from 7 to 2.
- The recruitment and retention incentive for existing and new staff had an 85% take-up. The service was considering contingency for the remaining 15% who hadn't signed up to the scheme should they choose to leave.
- The Newly Qualified Social Worker initiative and apprenticeship scheme were proving effective with increased recruitment in these areas.
- Good progress had been made with the management of sickness and long-term absence, with 0.8 FTE on long-term sick. The remainder of the absent staff cohort were for reasons of career break, suspensions or maternity.
- With a learning needs analysis and correct supervision and training in place, embedded work could now begin.

22.2 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People thanked the Director of Human Resources and Organisational change and wider team for the significant progress made against the workforce challenges. He noted that when an authority receives in an inadequate rating it was common to lose staff, particularly in the context of a large competitive market. The reward and development opportunities now in place would enable staff to undertake their roles with high satisfaction, with the children and young people of West Sussex the beneficiaries of that better work.

22.3 Members of the Committee asked the following questions regarding the update on workforce in Children's Social Care:

- The Committee asked for current number of caseloads per social worker. The Director of Children's Services advised there was still some variation, but broadly speaking it was approximately 20 per social worker. He added the administrative support for social workers proposal would help with the management of caseloads.
- Members were pleased to hear that the vacancy gap had decreased by 11% and considered if these posts were held by permanent or agency staff. The Executive Director People Services advised it was a combination of both.
- The Committee noted although agency staff were helpful in the short term, there was some concern about longer-term arrangements. The Head of Social Care advised that the agency staff were deployed as teams rather than individuals which demonstrated a commitment, and that the agency cohort were considered as part of the stable workforce. The recruitment

campaign had also been successful, and learning would be taken from this process.

- Members asked if a vacancy gap under 10% was in line with other authorities. The Director of Children's Services advised this was not uncommon, and the Director of Human Resources added this was the overall target for WSCC.
- Members noted the proposal to develop adequate administrative support for social workers and sought reassurance that it would be fit for purpose. The Director of Children's Services advised service leads were having discussions with other local authorities to see how the arrangement functioned elsewhere in order to put together a proposal for WSCC. He added this would facilitate time for social workers to be with children and families with rigorous support behind them.

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

- Evidence of early impact was being seen with foster to adopt placements, with the recent approval of two foster to adopt families. Better links with the new pre-birth team were being established in order to make earlier matches.
- Early care planning in pre-birth work will help to achieve permanence quickly for babies when born.
- An online referral form for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had been developed in conjunction with colleagues in adults services.
- A dip sampling exercise was underway of contacts to the MASH that result in no further action.
- Practice standards had been agreed, and induction guidance reviewed and updated for practice improvement.
- For the Children Looked After cohort (CLA), a health task and finish group (TFG) had been established with sign up from senior leads and health colleagues.
- All Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) for CLA had been booked, with wait times reducing.
- Training on education for CLA was now in place.
- There were currently no vacancies at social worker or management level.

22.5 Sarah Clark, Head of the Virtual School, advised the Committee of a rolling programme of training regarding the education of CLA and the impacts of the care experience, aimed at both schools and social workers. Contact would be made with head teachers and governors about the statutory responsibility in this regard, and events would be held to ensure consistent practice.

22.6 The Head of the Virtual School advised members they would receive an information document regarding schools in their division and the number of West Sussex CLA on their roll. Members were urged to visit their local schools and attend events to fully explore the provision and support for these children. Members would be provided with questions to pose to the head teacher which considered the reciprocal relationship

between schools and WSCC and the level of support they received from the Virtual School.

22.7 The Director of Children's Services introduced the draft decision report for the Adoption of an Improvement Plan for Children's Services. He explained the overall improvement planning framework for Children's Services could be described in three levels:

- Strategy for Children – the overarching model which will include a refresh of the 'best start in life' priority in the West Sussex Plan. The strategy would provide a clear vision and priority across the breadth of the service.
- Practice Improvement Plan – the plan sits within the overarching strategy and is aligned with the 12 recommendations for improvement from Ofsted. The plan has been developed in consultation with staff and partners.
- Children First Programme – the implementation mechanism under which the improvement plan is delivered. Practical improvement in areas of workforce, leadership, operating models, technology and multi-agency working falls under this ongoing improvement delivery programme.

22.8 The Director of Children's Services advised the Committee the Practice Improvement Plan (Appendix B) would be formally submitted and circulated in August. The committee asked questions in respect of the plan including those that follow:

- The Chairman advised the plan was helpful to cross reference progress against the 12 recommendations from Ofsted and it seemed to be a flexible document.
- Members of the Committee considered the danger of the plan lacking a wider holistic view. They further questioned how improvement would be measured overall in terms of the way in which the plan comes together.
- Garath Symonds, Senior Improvement Lead advised although the document was relatively narrow in its scope this was expected by the DfE and Ofsted to outline the plans for improvement. He added that a wider systemic change was required throughout the organisation. The Director of Children's Services advised the committee there were a range of specific action plans forming a wider overarching strategy.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained the monitoring visits provided an opportunity for communication and teamwork to enable WSCC fit and capable to take the service forward. He further explained that other more specific reviews within the service were taking place which each had a role to play in the overall delivery of improvement.
- The Committee asked how the service would effectively hold partners to account without compromising good relationships. The Director of Children's Services advised finding a balance in the relationship was key, and that the independently chaired Improvement Board comprising staff and partners was a formal

route for challenge and support. He explained the Board had challenged health partners on the poor performance of IHAs and that significant improvement in this area had been driven by the Board.

22.9 The Director of Children's Services provided the Committee with an update on both the Commissioner review, and progress with Ofsted to date. The key points included the following:

- Interviews and meetings were now underway, with diagnostics and the sharing of ideas to improve practice.
- WSCC had been invited to Hampshire County Council as a learning experience.
- The Commissioner's report would be completed by 30th September, it would then be submitted to the DfE.
- The Commissioner would be invited to attend an upcoming meeting of the Improvement Board.
- An action planning meeting with Ofsted took place in early July. This was an opportunity to share progress so far, and to collectively consider the logistics of the next 2 years.
- The first monitoring visit had been confirmed for the week commencing 25th November 2019. The report from which would be published. The subject focus for this first visit would likely be agreed in September.
- WSCC was well aligned with Ofsted and DfE colleagues, and there was support from the LGA. Neighbouring authorities were also keen to help WSCC in this journey to improvement.

22.10 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Receives information on the ratio of agency and permanent staff within Children's Social Care.
2. Suggests the member briefing on CLA in West Sussex schools is extended to governing bodies following its launch at the member day on 9th October 2019.
3. Supports the Cabinet Member decision to adopt the Improvement Plan for Children's Services.

23. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

23.1 Members of the Committee suggested that the BPG consider Elective Home Education as an item for future scrutiny.

24. Date of Next Meeting

24.1 The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 11th September 2019 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 3.35 pm

Chairman