

County Council - 7 June 2019

Agenda Item 8(a) - Notice of Motion by Mr Jones

Ofsted Report into Children's Services – Briefing Note

The County Council's Children's Social Care Services were the subject of an inspection by Ofsted between 25 February and 8 March 2019. A final report on the service was published on 8 May. All areas inspected were given an Ofsted assessment of 'inadequate'. The last Ofsted inspection of these services took place in 2016 when an overall finding of 'requires improvement to be good' was given.

One significant consequence of the inspection will be the issuing of a statutory direction by the Department for Education (DfE) to the County Council and the appointment of a commissioner by the Secretary of State to oversee the Council's response. The Council will be expected to work closely with the commissioner on the development and delivery of an improvement plan and it will be for the Commissioner to monitor and direct the Council in relation to it.

It will be for the Commissioner to determine whether the Council's improvement plan and the actions taken to deliver it are effective. That will inform the Commissioner's recommendation to the Secretary of State in relation to whether the County Council should retain responsibility for the direct provision of children's social care services. A timetable for the evaluation of progress against the improvement plan will be determined and monitored by the Commissioner. An initial review is likely to take place six months following the publication of the report and quarterly thereafter.

The report contains criticisms of the effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Changes to the Panel's constitution were agreed by the County Council at its April meeting and arrangements will be made for an update on the Panel's activity and future arrangements at the July meeting. The report was also critical of the Council's scrutiny function and the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee considered the implications of the report for effective scrutiny at its meeting on 15 May.

The Council's recently-established and independently-chaired Improvement Board will take the primary responsibility for managing and overseeing the implementation of the improvement plan and in providing a forum for partnership working on the plan in addition to the liaison with the DfE's appointed commissioner.

The Cabinet Member retains the statutory responsibility as lead member for Children's Services and will provide the County Council's direct accountability to the commissioner and the DfE. The Cabinet Member is a member, with the Leader, of the Improvement Board. As the Board will not have executive powers on behalf of the County Council the Cabinet Member and the Director of Children's Services will share the responsibility for taking all significant decisions for the implementation of the plan. These will be advertised through the Forward Plan in the usual way. The Children and Young People's Service Select Committee will, at its meeting on 19 June, consider the draft improvement plan and the Committee's business planning for scrutiny of its delivery.

There are monthly scheduled Member Days, overseen by the Member Development Group, to provide members with opportunities for learning and development. The next scheduled Member Days are on 26 June for budget planning and 10 July for the Fire and Rescue Service inspection outcome. There are currently no plans for a Member Day for Children's Services improvement but scheduled dates without allocated business are available.

The County Council has previously considered requests to review arrangements for the appointment to the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship of Select Committees and, in particular, a move to a presumption of appointments of opposition group members to such roles. The Council determined to retain the current arrangements on those occasions.

From 2000 until 2012 there was a minority group Chairman of the Adults' Services Select Committee. Up to 2009 there were six select committees, of which two had minority group vice-chairmen and four after 2009. In April 2012 the number of Select Committees reduced from six to four. All of the chairmanships and vice-chairmanships were majority group members from this point. A minority group member became Vice-Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee in October 2013.

The Select Committee protocol in the Constitution was amended by Council in February 2012 to say:

'The membership of Select Committees is set out in the Scheme of Delegation which includes guiding principles on the appointment of members. Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen will be appointed by the County Council on their individual merits, but the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of a Committee will usually be from different political groups. Members will usually serve on one Committee only.'

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