

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

8 June 2022 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present:

Cllr Linehan	Cllr Hall	Cllr Sparkes
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr McGregor	Mr Gurling, From 11am
Cllr Burgess, From 10.53am	Cllr Mercer	Mrs Norman
Cllr Cherry	Cllr Payne	
Cllr Cornell	Cllr Smith	

Apologies were received from Cllr Duncton and Mr Cristin

Absent: Mrs Ryan

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell

1. Election of Chairman

1.1 Cllr Linehan was proposed for the position of Chairman for one year by Cllr McGregor and seconded by Cllr Baldwin.

1.2 Cllr Smith was proposed for the position of Chairman for one year by Cllr Cornell and seconded by Cllr Cherry.

1.3 A secret ballot was held which was won by Cllr Linehan by seven votes to four.

1.4 Resolved – that Cllr Linehan is duly elected as Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

2. Election of Vice-Chairman

2.1 Cllr Baldwin was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for one year by Cllr McGregor and seconded by Cllr Sparkes.

2.2 Cllr Mercer was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for one year by Cllr Cherry and seconded by Cllr Smith.

2.3 A secret ballot was won by Cllr Baldwin by seven votes to four.

2.4 Resolved – that Cllr Baldwin is duly elected as Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

3. Business Planning Group Membership

3.1 Resolved – that the Committee appoints the following members to its Business Planning Group: Cllr Linehan, Cllr Baldwin, Cllr Cornell, Cllr McGregor and Cllr Mercer.

4. Declarations of Interests

4.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct the following declarations were made:

4.2 Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust.

4.3 Cllr Linehan declared a personal interest as the parent of a child with special educational needs.

4.4 Cllr Smith declared a personal interest as the parent of a child with special educational needs.

5. Urgent Matters

5.1 No urgent matters were raised.

6. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

6.1 The Director of Children, Young People and Learning updated the Committee on a meeting she had attended with at the Department for Education (DfE) on the 21 March 2022, to discuss the County Council's participation in the delivering better value in SEND support programme and the safety valve intervention programme. The County Council would be part of the second phase which was expected to start in autumn 2022.

6.2 A Committee Member asked if there would be an opportunity for Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to report on the delays to the Capital Programme connected with water neutrality and it was agreed to ask Cllr Jupp to circulate a briefing outside of the meeting.

6.3 It was highlighted that under point 54.2 the reference to Task Force Group should be corrected to Task and Finish Group.

6.4 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2022 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment as reflected in 6.3, and signed by the Chairman.

7. Regulatory Scrutiny of Children's Services and Children's Workforce Development

7.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item which she felt was a positive report but acknowledged that there were challenges, particularly in terms of recruitment, which was a national issue. The service was at a crucial juncture with one final monitoring visit before the full inspection (expected early 2023) and staff

were focussing hard on practice inconsistencies, the recruitment position and transition to the family safeguarding model.

7.2 The Assistant Director (Children First Transformation), Mr Clark, introduced the report, which set out some key issues from external regulators, from Ofsted and the DfE, along with information on staffing levels.

7.3 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

7.4 With the removal of the requirement to create a Children's Trust, the role of the Commissioner had been stepped down, however John Coughlan had agreed to be the independent chairman of the **Improvement Board**. The Director of Children, Young People and Learning agreed to share details with the Scrutiny Committee of the make-up of the Improvement Board and confirmed that recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee were fed into the Improvement Board. It was agreed to invite John Coughlan to a Scrutiny Committee meeting to gain his independent perspective on the progress made on the improvement journey.

7.5 The **staff** survey was voluntary and had been shared with the whole directorate, including Education and Skills. There had been disappointment at the dip in response levels and outcomes, but they were important to the management team and would be worked on. It was accepted that there had been a lot of pressures and changes which could have led to more negative outcomes. It was agreed to share with the Scrutiny Committee the full questions and outcomes document. There would be a focus on improving engagement in the autumn survey including creating time for staff to do the survey. It was confirmed there were other forms of engagement including leadership team drop-in sessions, office visits, stress awareness training and a staff conference in October which would focus on staff resilience through times of change.

7.6 The **recruitment of social workers** continued to be a national challenge. The service had a 62 (12%) unfilled permanent social care jobs, with 46 staff full-time absent (eg due to maternity leave, long-term sickness, secondments and career breaks), and was using 78 (15%) agency staff leaving a net 'uncovered vacancy gap' of around 30 (6%). During the pandemic, when work went virtual, there was an increase the proportion of agency workers supporting the service from out of county. With the return to face-to-face work much of that support had been lost. Recruitment was an absolute priority with the service working with Human Resources to fill vacant posts with the aspiration to have a fully permanent workforce. The service was also closely monitoring work being done by Adult Services to recruit social workers and were noting any lessons learned.

7.7 All **Social Workers recruited from overseas** must be registered with Social Work England and were trained on the differences that working in the United Kingdom brings.

7.8 The **Grow Our Own** scheme involved an annual apprenticeship scheme, and numbers were good, as shown in the report, and retention

levels were good. It was acknowledged that the pandemic had impacted on learning and extra support would be provided for a year. Reaching a level of sufficiency would depend on future demand.

7.9 **Retention payments** were no longer used to retain social workers. Feedback had been that a market-related supplement and a good working environment had reduced staff movement.

7.10 The timeliness of **initial health assessments** remained an area of focus for improvement. A problem-solving event had taken place with health partners and an action plan developed to prioritise initial assessments for children we care for. Improvements were being seen in the health referrals and clinical time space to provide the assessment, following the easing of Covid restrictions.

7.11 The **re-referral rate** per 10,000 was in a much better place than 12 months earlier. The County Council had moved from being radically above the national rate and now sat in the middle of the neighbourhood statistical and national rates. Work was underway with multi-agency partners to further improve the rate. The conversion rate from contacts to referrals was where it would be expected to be, but the recent volume is higher than expected and it is a priority to analyse and understand why. Viewing the figures over the year they were more in line with the national average.

7.12 The timeliness of **initial Child Protection conferences** had improved over the last 12 months but was still not where the service would like it to be.

7.13 The comprehensive **information system** work was reported as progressing well and an ICT Integration Board, chaired by the Assistant Director (Children First Transformation), Mr Clark, met monthly, amongst lots of other work. A timetable was being worked up and could be shared with the Scrutiny Committee.

7.14 The **Family Safeguarding Model (FSM)** is a nationally recognised approach based on working with families to work with their strengths and empower families. Phase 1 involved a restructure to the workforce which took place in February 2022 and is complete. Phase two provides workers who work with adults in families through partnerships with partner organisations like health and probation. This phase is fully underway and it was hoped the full model will be launched by autumn 2022. The aim of the FSM would be to work with families in a way that helps children remain within their families and receive the care they need to thrive. The impact of this will be to reduce overall demand on children's social care and to improve the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the quarterly Performance and Resource Report. An independent evaluation of how the model was working would also be carried out.

7.15 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Recognises the progress that has been made on the improvement journey and thanks service and Cabinet Member for their continued work.

2. Welcomes John Coughlan continuing as independent chairman of the Improvement Board and agrees to invite him to attend a future meeting of the Committee to gain his independent perspective on the progress made on the improvement journey.
3. Raises concerns over some of the staff survey results around morale and resilience and requests that the full questions of the survey are shared with the Committee.
4. Recognises the national and regional challenge of social work recruitment and will continue to monitor recruitment and retention of workforce through the Business Planning Group to have evidence that the interventions and strategies put in place are working.
5. Requests to have a copy of the Action Plan from the recruitment and retention problem solving event held on 13 May, once complete, to help understand how this is being addressed.

8. Governance and Forward Planning Arrangements in Children's Services

8.1 The report was introduced by Senior Improvement Lead, Ms Warren, who said much work had been done on the practice improvement plan since it was developed in 2019. The plan had been refreshed and identified three key priorities which were embedded across the service.

8.2 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

8.3 The **Education and Skills** work is integrated across the other workstreams within the governance structure and there were governance arrangements including the SEND and Inclusion Strategy Board and clear governance arrangements for the Adult Education. It was recognised that this could be more explicitly set out in the governance structure to clearly map out the governance structures within Education and Skills.

8.4 The **SEND and Inclusion Strategy Board** reported to the Children First Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board since the Integrated Care System (ICS) had a responsibility for SEND, and the Children First Board was due to receive an update on performance later in the week. The Director of Children, Young People and Learning, Ms Butler, told the Scrutiny Committee they could receive information on the issues raised by the SEND and Inclusion Strategy Board to seek assurance on whether the SEND and Inclusion Strategy was meeting its targets.

8.5 The explanation of work of the sub-groups in development in Appendix 1 of the agenda papers could be expanded to include Terms of reference and work undertaken for a future meeting.

8.6 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Highlights the importance of Education and Skills given the key areas of work and asks that the governance structures are reviewed to ensure the Education and Skills workstreams are adequately reflected.
2. Requests further details on the Operational Boards outlined in Appendix 1 as they develop (to include Terms of Reference and work undertaken).
3. Requests that information on the progress of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy as reported to the Children First Board is shared with the Committee so that it can identify if there are any items it may wish to bring to a future Scrutiny Committee.

9. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

9.1 The Committee discussed the work programme, and the following suggestions were made.

9.2 Ask the Business Planning Group (BPG) to consider how the overheating of the labour market and hyper-inflation might affect the areas reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee, particularly against budget restraints.

9.3 Agrees that school readiness is a priority and will consider when to bring to a future meeting.

9.4 Ask the BPG to review the inspection report on Youth Justice once it is available to see if there are any areas for scrutiny.

9.5 Ask the BPG to consider scrutiny into short breaks for disabled children and changes in provision within the next year.

9.6 Ask the BPG to consider whether the Schools White Paper has implications for the Elective Home Education item on the work programme.

9.7 Consider how to re-engage with consultees and service users of the Early Help service to see how the new service is doing.

9.8 Following the imminent all-member written briefing on mental health services for young people, the BPG to consider aspects what might need scrutinising.

9.9 BPG to be kept up to date on the impact of reduced birth rates on demand for school places.

10. Requests for Call-In

10.1 There had been no request for call-in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

11. Date of Next Meeting

11.1 The next meeting would be a virtual meeting held on 12 July 2022 at 1.30pm.

The meeting ended at 12.23 pm

Chairman