

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Committee Room 1 - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 16 July 2018 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor CA Gandy (Chairman)
Councillor FM Norman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: CR Butler, ACR Chappell, JF Johnson, MT McEvelly and A Seldon

Co-optees: Mr P Burbidge, Mr A James and Mr P Sell

In attendance: Councillors EJ Swinglehurst

Officers: Chris Baird, Director of Children's Wellbeing, Liz Elgar, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support, Lisa Fraser, Assistant Director Education Development and Skills, Alison Forshaw, Children's Social Work Manager (Fostering), Gill Smith, Children's Social Work Manager (Adoption), Amanda Price, Children's Commissioning and Contracts Lead, Matthew Evans, Democratic Services Officer

1. WELCOME

The Chairperson welcomed all those present to the meeting and updated the committee on its membership. Since the last meeting Mrs Fisher the education co-optee and parent governor representative for the primary sector had resigned from the committee. A letter would be sent to outline the gratitude of the committee for the work Mrs Fisher had undertaken. The Chairperson also announced that the current meeting was Mr Sell's last meeting as an education co-optee and representative of the Diocese of Hereford. Mr Sell was thanked for the work he had undertaken on the committee and previously with the General Scrutiny Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The Chairperson proposed a change to the minutes of the previous meeting. The proposed change concerned recommendation (f) under the Learning Disability Strategy to clarify the intent of the committee and ensure that the recommendation was accepted by the executive for action. The committee agreed that the recommendation was changed to the wording below:

f. asks the executive and the CCG to investigate methods of joint working with GP surgeries to assist those with learning disabilities to more easily obtain bus passes'

RESOLVED: that subject to the change outlined above the committee approves the minutes of the meeting on 14 May 2018.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from members of the Council.

6. FOSTERING AND ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORTS 2017/18

The committee received a report concerning the fostering and adoption service reports for 2017/18. The Director Children's Wellbeing (DCWB) introduced the report and explained that the two reports provided an annual review of the previous year and recommendations for the services for the current year.

The committee raised those comments in the discussion which followed:

Adoption report

- It was noted that there was an income target of £74k for the adoption service and it was queried how challenging this target was to achieve in the context of the overspent budgets in 2017/18 of the fostering service budget and external fostering budget. *The DCWB explained that the fostering and adoption services had overspent in order to meet the needs of children and families. The overspent budgets had been taken into account during the budget setting process for 2018/19. There were local, regional and national pressures upon budgets to support looked after children and those moving to adoption in the current year. The income target was affected by the move to regional adoption agencies, which was a national requirement. The Council had been able to apply to a central government fund to recoup some costs involved in the purchase of placements.*
- It was queried whether the recent funding allocated to Children's Wellbeing would be allocated to address the overspends. *The DCWB explained that the £1.6m funding was dedicated to projects identified as priorities in the service to address capacity issues, including trying to recruit more social workers, family support workers and business support to reduce caseload pressures on social work staff and to enable there to be more capacity to support managers to manage.*
- There was concern expressed at the length of time it had taken to join a regional adoption agency (RAA). The committee requested an update on progress made to join an RAA. *The Childrens Social Work Manager - Adoption (CSWMA) advised the committee that Adoption Central England (ACE) had accepted an application but a more detailed case had yet to be presented to the Executive Board of ACE. A date was not yet known when the Council would join the agency but it was hoped that this would occur later in the year. The move to regional adoption agencies was a priority for the government and ACE was now*

required to determine the membership of the Council. The timing had been affected by national government and periods of elections and purdah.

- It was queried whether the training provided by the Council for carers was consistent with the standards of ACE and an explanation of the budgetary impacts on the Council of remaining outside of the RAA was requested? *The CSWMA explained that ACE had adopted the training framework of the Council and the financial impacts consisted of greater spending on placements.*
- The Committee commended the adoption service on placements achieved during the year in particular those sibling groups placed together where possible.
- It was noted that the report referred to gaps in research of a child's birth family and parents. This had been an issue highlighted previously and it was hoped that it would be addressed in the forthcoming year.
- It was queried how the adoption service was taking account of the savings proposal to reduce the number of looked after children. *The DCWB explained that the service sought to achieve permanent family placements to ensure that children were no longer looked after.*
- The priority for development during 2018-19 of improving timeliness of permanent placements following court authority was raised and it was queried how this was being monitored. *The CSWMA confirmed that constant monitoring took place with a robust process in place to track the progress of all children. The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support (ADSFS) explained that communication between the teams working in the child protection/court teams and adoption services was good which enabled consistent and effective monitoring of the progress of children toward permanent placements.*
- The committee discussed recommendations to express concern regarding the lack of progress to join a regional adoption agency and require further briefing in respect of budget overspends

Fostering report

- The high level of referrals to the fostering service was noted and it was queried how this was being addressed. *The DCWB explained that early help services sought to address issues prior to the involvement of social care services. Close work was undertaken with the courts, carers and families to determine the appropriateness of placing children in care but the cabinet had recognised that more needed to be done to have an effective early help offer in the county.*
- The recruitment of foster carers was raised as an issue and whether there was a problem with retiring carers reducing the number of placements available. *The Childrens Social Work Manager – Fostering (CSWMF) explained that the carers market was being investigated and placements for adolescents were being targeted.*
- The trend of a significant increase of referrals in June was highlighted. *The ADSFS explained that there was always a spike in referrals ahead of the summer holidays.*
- The location of unaccompanied asylum seeker and migrants with families in appropriate areas was raised.
- The concession offered to looked after children at Halo was raised and it was proposed that other cultural and leisure providers in Herefordshire should be approached to request similar discounts.

RESOLVED: that the committee:

- 1) Expresses concern regarding the lack of progress in joining a regional adoption agency and the executive is requested to undertake any available actions to expedite membership of Adoption Central England;**

- 2) Requests clarification regarding how the overspends of the fostering service and external fostering budget in 2017/18 have been addressed;
- 3) Asks the executive to approach local cultural and leisure providers to attempt to secure concessionary rates for looked after children; and
- 4) Notes the annual reports 2017/18 for the fostering and adoption services.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2018 - 2023

The committee considered a report which set out the draft Children and Young People Plan 2018 – 2023 ahead of its presentation to Cabinet and full Council. The Childrens Commissioning and Contracts Lead (CCCL) introduced the report and explained that the plan was outcome focused, based on priorities for children across Herefordshire which had been drawn up through engagement with partners. The Plan contained four key priorities which would be subject to a consultation to be undertaken over summer 2018. The Plan was a high level documents; a detailed delivery plan would be developed in due course to implement the priorities.

The committee raised the issues below in the discussion that followed:

- There was concern locally about delays of access to services provided by CAMHS and the potential impact on school attendance which could result in penalties imposed on parents. *The CCCL confirmed that mental health needs were a significant element throughout the Plan and in particular of the Be Healthy priority.*
- It was felt that the Plan required a greater emphasis on the impact of economic wellbeing on children and young people. The impact of poverty on the lives of children and young people was significant and the Plan should refer to poverty reduction strategies. *The CCCL confirmed that poverty was not mentioned explicitly in the Plan but it was recognised in areas concerning barriers and challenges to the success of children. This was evident in detail in the Plan concerned with the raising of attainment of children eligible for Free School Meals.*
- The committee explained that it was important that there was context in the Plan regarding areas across Herefordshire of relative deprivation. *The CCCL explained that the next stage of the consultation would look to draw together local information and intelligence.*
- The committee welcomed the Plan and felt it was a coherent and focused document.
- Members felt that the Plan should make reference to refugee and migrant families in the County.
- The Plan was also felt to require mention of net migration into the County particularly in light of the new university and young people coming to Hereford to access higher education.
- The gap between the proportion of children with SEN nationally and those in Herefordshire was raised and what explanation there could be for the high level recorded in the county. *The DCWB explained that work was being undertaken to look into this issue.*
- It was felt that the Plan should refer to the issue of County lines which was an issue that was not fully recognised in Herefordshire as a rural area.

RESOLVED: that the Committee recommends that the Plan includes reference to:

- a) the impact of poverty and deprivation on children and young people;
- b) refugee and migrant children and families; and
- c) the issue of County lines under the be safe from harm priority.

The meeting adjourned at 3.16 p.m. and reconvened at 3.21 p.m.

8. CHILD PROTECTION NUMBERS

The committee received a report relating to the number of children subject to child protection arrangements and work undertaken to address an increase in numbers over Winter 2017/18. The ADSFS introduced the report and explained that following a sharp increase in the number of child protection cases an action plan had been developed which had decreased the number of children to a current number of 169. This had been achieved by stepping down cases to early help and other support services. An assessment of the appropriateness of thresholds to put children on child protection plans had been undertaken.

The Committee made the comments below in the discussion that followed:

- The reduction in the number of children was very welcome and it was recognised that there had been a significant reduction. The thresholds were queried and whether the guidance followed at Herefordshire Council was national, regional or local? *The ADSFS confirmed that the threshold guidance was local to Herefordshire but it did not differ significantly from guidance in other areas;*
- The committee queried when reviews of the thresholds occurred and whether there was consideration of the interpretation of government guidance during such reviews. Clarification regarding the thresholds was requested and whether level 1 was universal across all children in Herefordshire. *The ADSFS explained that level 1 of the threshold represented the universal position that children who required no additional support occupied. Some children faced challenges through childhood and would need to be escalated or stepped-down across the levels;*
- The committee highlighted the importance of early intervention to address issues before additional support was required and there was escalation to the higher threshold levels. It was noted that children could move into level 2 where the need for early intervention had not been recognised; the importance of identifying the need for support from evidence such as missing routine health checks was emphasised. *The ADSFS explained that the service sought to work with families to address issues at an early stage. Health visitors were trained to identify issues and make referrals to the MASH where appropriate.*
- The committee supported the work with families and asked about consistency of practice which had been criticised previously. *The ADSFS reported that Ofsted had assessed the 'front door' as robust; but it was acknowledged that occasionally there was a tendency to see issues as more serious than they actually were;*
- The committee commended the action plan and was pleased with the progress made to address the number of children in child protection arrangements.

RESOLVED: that the committee notes the report and the progress made against the action plan.

9. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The committee considered a report concerning its work programme. The committee was asked to agree: its latest schedule of business for 2018/19; two scopes for task and finish groups and the appointment of chairpersons; a spotlight review concerning dental health and childhood obesity; and an additional meeting in October, at a date to be finalised by the chairperson.

It was proposed that the task and finish group concerning Special Education Needs provision be chaired by Councillor FM Norman and Mr James agreed to sit on the group. It was proposed that Councillor MT McEvelly chair the PRU Referrals task and finish group and Councillor ACR Chappell agreed to sit on the group. It was confirmed that requests to join the membership of the groups would be sent to the group leaders.

RESOLVED: that the committee:

- (a) approves an additional meeting in October (to be finalised by the chairperson following the meeting) and the work programme as set out at appendix a, subject to any amendments the committee wishes to make;**
- (b) approves the terms of reference in appendix b for two task and finish groups – i) Special Education Needs (SEN) Provision; and ii) PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) Referrals – and agrees the appointment of Councillors Norman and McEvelly as respective chairpersons for the two groups;**
- (c) agrees the undertaking of a spotlight review on the afternoon of 17 September relating to dental health and childhood obesity; and**
- (d) notes the recommendation tracker in appendix c.**

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the committee would be held on 17 September at 10.15 a.m.

The meeting ended at 3.40 pm

Chairman