

MINUTES of the meeting of Health & Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber - Brockington on Friday 16 November 2012 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor JW Millar (Chairman)
Councillor SJ Robertson (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, PL Bettington, KS Guthrie, JLV Kenyon, MD Lloyd-Hayes, GA Powell, A Seldon and J Stone

In attendance: Councillor PM Morgan and Mr D McCallum (Independent Chair, Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board).

Officers: C Baird (Assistant Director People's Services Commissioning), J Brooks (Programme Manager, Maximising Independence), J Davidson (Director of People's Services, K O'Mahoney (Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services), J Roughton (Head of Children & Families Casework), D Penrose (Governance Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors WLS Bowen, MJK Cooper, JG Lester and PJ Watts.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor A Seldon for Councillor WLS Bowen.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

There were no suggestions from the public.

5. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

6. OFSTED SAFEGUARDING REPORT

The Committee received a report on the arrangements being made to address the findings of the OFSTED inspection of early help and child protection services in Herefordshire, undertaken between the 10th and 19th September 2012.

The Director of People's Services reported that this was the first inspection under a new national inspection framework that would only be in place until April 2013, and Herefordshire was the fourth area to be inspected in the country. Inspections had focused on those areas

that were judged to be adequate or inadequate. A new multi agency, multi-inspectorate inspection framework would be in place thereafter, which would inspect all agencies at the same time.

Whilst there were strengths, particularly in the area of early years help, the inspectors had identified a number of significant weaknesses in the quality and effectiveness of child protection practice, the effectiveness of leadership and governance in child protection and therefore the impact of the child protection services on outcomes and experiences for children and their families. As a result of these weaknesses, OFSTED judged arrangements in Herefordshire to be inadequate for all elements.

The Director went on to say that, under national arrangements, all councils graded inadequate were considered to require the oversight of the Department for Education (DfE), to ensure the improvements made were as rapid as possible, and were likely to continue to improve. It was likely that Herefordshire would require an Improvement Notice from the Minister which would be developed with the Council. This would set out the specific improvements to be made and the timescales for doing this. It could take up to two years to be in a position to reach an 'adequate' rating. An Improvement Board had been established which comprised the Chief Officers of all relevant partner organisations; the Lead Member for the Council; external advice from the DfE and an Independent Chairman. In the ensuing discussion, a number of issues were discussed.

The Director said that there would be an audit of all cases by an independent organisation in order to provide a baseline understanding of the practice issues that the Council was experiencing.

The Independent Chairman of the Children's Safeguarding Board reported that, since 2010, the Board had not addressed the issue of how all the agencies worked together. This was an issue that OFSTED had commented on, and if Agencies did not respond quickly enough, or the quality of practitioners, including social workers was not adequate, then hard edged child protection would not be delivered. This was a situation that would be addressed.

In reply to concerns expressed by Members, the Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services said that significant steps were being made to address the low baseline from which children's social care was working. Issues had been identified and a Principle Social Worker appointed, who was also the Head of Children & Families Casework. The recruitment and retention of staff was a relentless process, but there were very few experienced potential staff available in the market place. Work was underway to explore all issues regarding recruitment and retention including remuneration of social workers and managers and how this compared regionally.

The Head of Children & Families Casework said that there was confidence amongst staff that the qualities of social workers were recognised within the management structure of the Council. Staff felt confident to report issues internally and to expect a resolution without the need to resort to whistleblowing. He went on to say that the degree of Member involvement had been a great support in the past, both to the workforce and to support of the decisions that had to be made.

There had been a three-fold increase in safeguarding referrals without comparable growth in social work staff to support such an increase. There was an anxiety that social workers were being asked to deal with issues that could have been picked up at much earlier stage, before social work intervention was required.

In reply to a question, the Assistant Director said that there were 51 FTE social worker posts, of which 94% were filled. There were more staff than the total number of posts as a result of the use of agency workers working above establishment in order to address

the caseloads. The aspiration was to reduce the caseload burden on social workers to seventeen, although this would depend on the nature of the cases. OFSTED had noted the progress made in reducing caseloads.

A Member pointed out that some of the issues raised in the OFSTED were the same ones that had been highlighted in the 2010 report and pointed out that whilst all Members were corporate parents, the ultimate responsibility for the service lay with the Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing) and suggested that an apology for the situation should be forthcoming. The Cabinet Member replied that she had expressed disappointment in the findings of the OFSTED report, and pointed out that whilst it was a valuable exercise, it should be seen as a snapshot in time which would help to inform choices for the future of the service.

A Member supported the need for Councillors to understand their role as corporate parents, and said that it was important that there was no impact on the early help service and that regular monitoring of the degree of communication between partner agencies should be maintained.

The Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services said that there was a great deal of pressure on social care and children's provider services budgets. There was significant spend in the agency budgets, although this had been significantly tackled and reduced. This was a high cost area, and a strategic approach was required to deal with the issue but to still be in the position to meet the needs of children placed in care. Over the past year good strategic and operational work had resulted in in-house fostering provision in Herefordshire increasing, which would be beneficial both to children and to social care budgets. The Assistant Director emphasised the importance of early help, and that it was vital at this time that early support for families should not be reduced – particularly in light of the fact that OFSTED judged these services to be good.

The Cabinet Member (Health & Wellbeing) said that she would welcome support from the Committee in the upcoming budget discussions for the settlement for 2013/14. She believed that it was important that Children's Safeguarding should be supported by good services which would have beneficial outcomes for children and would, ultimately, cost the Council less to run.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) That the report be noted; and;**
- (b) A standing Review Group be set up to support the work of the Improvement Board.**

7. QUARTERLY REPORT OUTLINING SAVINGS THAT ARE BEING ACHIEVED THROUGH THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR DELIVERING ADULT SERVICES

The Committee noted the quarterly report outlining savings that were being achieved through the strategic plan for delivering adult services. The Programme Manager, Maximising Independence reported that the total savings target established for 2012/13 was £7.956m on a budget of £50.04m. This represented a significant challenge and an ambitious programme of work had been established. Budget savings had been profiled across the financial year and the cumulative target at the end of quarter 2 was £1.849m, of which £1.691m had been achieved. In the ensuing discussion, the following areas were highlighted:

- That there were currently 5 schemes areas that were indicated as having a red status in the table in the update report. The scheme for increased charges had a target of £933k had been approved, with an adjustment to the proposals to take into account the decision not to charge carers for services. It was estimated that £250k would be achieved through charging in the current year.
- The review of the systems process area between the Wye Valley NHS Trust, Hoople Ltd and the Council was the reason that no figures were available in certain sections of the table in the update report.

In reply to a question, the Programme Manager confirmed that the £500k of nonrecurring savings would have to be found again next year, but that the figure would depend on the budget target that had been set.

It was noted that a number of schemes were also rated as having an amber status in the report.

In reply to concerns regarding issues surrounding the budget, the Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing) said that she was aware of the overspend in this area, and the disruptive impact that this had on other services. There had been a great deal of improvement in understanding the structure of the budget and the impacts upon it. She was determined that the Council should have a budget that was realistic and robust and added that there would be hard choices ahead for other services.

In reply to a question, the Director of People said that the redesign and implementation by the Wye Valley Trust of the re-ablement pathways would continue to be monitored by the Council, as commissioners of the service.

RESOLVED:

That

- a) **The report be noted and;**
- b) **Adequate resources should be made available to ensure stability in the workforce and maintain stability with the Service.**

8. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group presented the report from the Task & Finish Group on 'Safeguarding Arrangement for Children in Herefordshire. He outlined the recommendations to the Committee, and during the ensuing discussion, the following point were raised:

In reply to a question, the Director of People's Services said that it was mandatory for a Local Authority who was placing a Looked After Child in care in a home in another Authority to inform that Authority of the placement. Compliance with the legislation did depend on the local authority concerned, but evidence showed that most authorities had informed the Council of relevant placements. The matter had been raised with directors of Children's Services in other authorities, and the Director suggested that the Committee give consideration to lobbying other scrutiny committees in the region.

In reply to a question, the Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services said that there was a recruitment and retention strategy in place for social workers, who were being recruited on more than the establishment level of pay. This was a slow

process, as there was a lack of good quality social workers coming through the system. There was movement around the region, which meant that, as well as a focus on training up social workers from staff within the Council, recruitment was possible

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the Committee agreed the findings and recommendations contained in report of the Task & Finish Group – Safeguarding Arrangement for Children in Herefordshire and to forward the report to the Executive for consideration; and**
 - (b) the Executive’s response to the Review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive has approved its response.**

9. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the work programme.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- That the Committee should consider the Cabinet monitoring report when it was considering the budget for the coming year.
- A review of the quality of Adult Social Care had been commissioned, and that this should be considered when the Committee reviewed Adult Safeguarding.
- In light of the change in Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure and membership, the membership of the Task and Finish Group on Adult Safeguarding in the home should be reviewed.
- A Task and Finish Group on Access to Services should be scoped for consideration at the next meeting.
- The Standing Task and Finish Review Group on Safeguarding would be chaired by Councillor SJ Robertson.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 1.05 pm

CHAIRMAN