

RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 13 DECEMBER 2022 (Minute Item 118).

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

From: Hanna Currie

Q: Please can the Committee look at and report the range rather than the average of allocated social worker numbers broken down to show the timescale of involvement via a range and if possible to include the number of agency staff compared to permanent staff allocated per item in the range, to see how the reliance on agency staff effects the relationship with children and families?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People: appreciated the question, but explained it was for the Committee to answer.

Chair: Committee would seek out the requested information.

ACTION:

- a) **The Committee to request, look at and report the range rather than the average of allocated social worker numbers broken down to show the timescale of involvement, via a range and if possible to include the number of agency staff compared to permanent staff allocated per item in the range.**
- b) **The Committee to request clarification from the directorate on how the reliance on agency staff impacts the relationship with children and families.**

From: Hanna Currie (on behalf of Teresa Fenner)

Q: I would like to hear if other foster carers past and present can give their points of view and be consulted on what should be improved. For us it would be that the promises of support and respite be given and that reports are truthful and accurate. No point in recruitment if the service continues to make excuses for bad practices. As for early help, ask the parents what would benefit them and their families and stop haranguing them for asking for help.

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People stated there was a lot of working going on with the current foster carers and added if there were any previous foster carers that would like to speak with him, he'd be happy for them to speak with either Robina Khan (Head of Service Fostering and Placements) or himself. There was a big piece of work going on at the moment to review support in place for foster carers and the Director agreed entirely that foster carers were a valuable resource and that he wanted to recruit and support more foster carers going forward. The Director said he had recently met two former foster carers and was happy to meet others.

The Director for Children and Young People explained that the provision of early help services wasn't primarily the responsibility of children and social care services and that it

should be the responsibility of a wide range of agencies. Recent activity through the world cafes and Talk Community had aimed to develop the range of early help services that were in place for families, with the intention to extend that range and create more opportunities for families to seek that help and support directly or online, rather than children's services. The early help helpline would be opening again in January 2023. He'd had a lot of feedback from families about how this had been done and were told they appreciated the early help helpline.

Cllr J Hewitt enquired whether the impediment to close it was resource?

The Director for Children and Young People explained it was a change in process at the time, the early help resource was still in the MASH, but the helpline was stopped because of a challenge from a previous Ofsted visit. They had to get the threshold right before bringing it back. It had been a reaction to a feedback process. Clarity was provided on early help and the range of services it provided.

From: Chair (on behalf of Rachel Gallagher)

Q: How is being separated from a sibling ever in the best interest of any child? Put yourself in our shoes, would you support your own children being separated? Of the 10 placements orders made in 2021, how many were made with the consent of the parents and have all the placement orders made in 2021/22 so far been made with the consent of the parents?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People explained that placements orders were made by the courts.

From: Chair (on behalf of Fiona Reid)

Q: The response to the original question mentioned views and opinions of families expressed at recent general meetings, however I know of only one meeting, which was held on 20 October 2022, which was organised by the support group for birth families called a common bond - some councillors attended but I understand no officers were present, although at least two were invited. HCB could have been invited to collaborate on a draft improvement plan and could collaborate in future. Birth parents and children are the main service users of children's services, I hope the forum for families will mainly be represented by them, there should be representatives from parents whose children are or were involved in different ways, eg looked after children. I hope you will listen, address feedback and take 'appropriate action' and 'collaborate' with families at pace. When will the first meeting of the forum actually happen?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People agreed entirely with Ms. Reid, that there was a need to listen to families more going forward. Hopefully the draft proposal for listening to families will be available in January. Once we've had feedback on what we are proposing we'll get that group of organisations and representatives together as early as possible, certainly before Easter and hopefully by the end of February.

From: David Barratt

Q: There seems to be have hard work over the last three months to compose a plan to demonstrate change has been delivered at pace. As a parent I feel little has changed in

practice. If changes have been made as suggested by the Directorate, why, as a family, do we feel threatened by social workers and live in fear of the removal of our children? Why in your role of corporate parent do you feel it is in anyone's, let alone a minor's, best interests not to leave a hospital ward for fresh air or to visit a hospital chapel? Hospital staff were content for my daughter to get fresh air, however your frontline staff and even the CEO of Herefordshire council were not. This went against my child's basic human rights and my rights as a legal guardian. I have recently been told verbally that fostering arrangements against me and my family have been stopped, but please advise how many families have been consulted to see if any of the measures put in in the last three months have been recognised by them? If no such consultation has taken place, would you agree that it is unreasonable to suggest that changes made are effective for the families?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People explained that he was sorry that that had been Mr Barratt's experience, but he couldn't discuss individual family circumstances in a public meeting. He was, however, happy to meet Mr Barratt for a conversation about his experience. In terms of consultation, one of the things acknowledged in the process was the importance of engaging and consulting with families, which is why they're working on the listening to families approach (as mentioned elsewhere in the meeting). Methods of measurement they wanted to be used were not only what was reported in terms of performance, but also checking quality assurance audits and feedback, compliments, complaints and engagement activities from families. There hasn't been enough of this and there needed to be more.

From: Maggie Steel

Q: Parents do not believe that the external examiner is looking at any other cases and I'd just like to hear whether we are wrong? I mean actively looking.

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People explained he was not able to answer that question, as he did not know the status that the examiner had reached with individual cases. The director said he would take this question back and ask.

From: Melissa Portman-Lewis

Q: In my personal experience SEND children and young people are still poorly understood. Parents of SEND children are still missing out on vital education and their basic needs remain unmet. When I have raised the alarm many times through many mediums, the pattern is still delay, denial of need. How do you intend to achieve and measure cultural change in a timely manner and with a timescale?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People was sorry that had been Ms. Portman-Lewis's experience. There was significant work going on, which included parent carer voice** and it was one of the key partners in developing an SEND strategy, which brings together key strategic groups and partners within health, education and care. The feedback from the peer review commissioned in October reflects some of the changes related to the SEND green

paper. It was a huge piece of work, but the Director said he would be happy to provide a full update on the SEND work stream.

****COMMENT FROM PARENT CARER VOICE**

A representative of the Common Bond at the meeting asked for a communication from Parent Carer Voice be noted as follows:

“Parent Carer Voice have no idea or recollection of what the DCS is saying and have not agreed to it”. Confirmed by Debbie Hobbs, Manager of Parent Carer Voice.

Parent Carer Voice requested that it was not mentioned again unless it had given consent and had agreed to what the DCS was saying.