

Lancashire County Council

Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 13th March, 2024 at 10.30 am in
Committee Room 'C' - The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston**

Present:

County Councillor Sue Hind (Chair)

County Councillors

M Clifford	R Woollam
S Barnes	N Khan
A Cheetham	P Rigby
A Hindle	S Clarke
T Hurn	M Salter
J Potter	B Yates

Co-opted members

David Ballard
John Withington

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Stuart Jones.

County Councillor Barrie Yates replaced County Councillor Peter Britcliffe for this meeting only.

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3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

A non-pecuniary interest was declared by County Councillor Anne Cheetham, as she was a former foster parent for Lancashire County Council and a school governor.

A non-pecuniary interest was declared by County Councillor Nweeda Khan, as she is an independent fostering panel member and a school governor.

4. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 31 January 2024

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Contextual Safeguarding Re-Model and Implementation of the EmPower Contextual Safeguarding Multi Disciplinary Team

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Jacquie Old, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Louise Anderson, Director of Children's Social Care and Georgine Lee, Head of Service, Front Door, Assessment and Adolescent Services to the meeting.

The report and presentation circulated with the agenda pack provided an update on the development and progress of the Contextual Safeguarding Re-Model. It also provided information on the implementation of the EmPower Contextual Safeguarding Multi-Disciplinary Team.

Members were invited to ask questions and a summary is outlined below:

- Concern was raised by members over anti-social behaviour, specifically knife crime in Lancashire, members queried what was being done to reduce rates of violence and if preventative measures were in place in the community such as knife safety kits. It was explained to members that a strategy for dealing with knife crime was in development and research was being conducted into successful strategies used by other authorities where knife crime was more prevalent. It was highlighted to the committee that the strategy being developed was focused on the complex and early intervention end that Children's Social Care was involved in, and that the Violence Reduction Unit took the leading role in serious youth violence and reducing it, and in developing a knife strategy that was evidence informed already. The committee were informed that regarding knife safety kits, the service was working with Knife Angel, for awareness, and prevention. Furthermore, the committee were informed that the Community Safety Partnership also played a key role in the preventative strategy. It was also explained to members that a representative sat on every local Community Safety Partnership group.
- Members commented that it would be beneficial to have the contact details for local MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) Teams.
- It was queried by the committee the likelihood of filling the vacancies in the 7 Contextual Safeguarding Multi-Disciplinary Teams, and what proportion of staff were already in post. The committee were informed that the majority of positions had been filled including all the Parenting Support Worker posts, all the Missing From Home Worker posts, all the Child and Family Practitioners, 2 of 7 Targeted Youth Worker positions were filled



and that 3 Social Worker vacancies were currently out for advert with a projection the team would be fully staffed by Summer 2024.

- The committee raised concern over the effectiveness of a multi-agency system and queried how information from different agencies was managed and communicated. Members were informed that regular communication and meetings with partner agencies were in place, it was also explained to the committee that the same multi-agency training was undertaken by every agency involved and that the multi-agency information sharing arrangements were well established between Childrens Social Care, Health Services and the Police where staff were co-located with the Police in most areas. Daily meetings around exploitation took place with the Police and Health Services and work was ongoing to see how this could be further expanded. Members heard that the use of multi-disciplinary teams and the use of different perspectives, skills and knowledge of professional partners really aided with complex cases, and often aided the response to the child. It was requested by members if regular updates could be given on the effectiveness of the multi-agency system in the future and in order to put Youth Violence in context with surrounding areas, it was felt that a future item on this and what was being done in Lancashire could be presented to the committee.
- It was queried which staff member was a child's key worker within Lancashire County Council's staffing structure. The committee were informed that the allocated social worker was the lead professional, but the key worker would be the staff member with the best relationship with the child. It was further explained to members that this was on an individual basis and was reliant on whom the child best responded to, and other professionals would weigh in to build the relationship with the child.
- It was queried by the committee what the threshold was to be referred to the service, and how a referral to the team was made. Members were informed that the Team Around the Family concept was used at an early intervention level, it was further explained to the committee that a child in need of statutory services met the threshold. Members heard that the Early Intervention Strategy was in place to ensure the public were aware of community resources, to intervene before a child needed statutory services.
- It was questioned by the committee if there were any known issues with the multi-agency strategy, and if there were any negatives. The committee were informed that there were potential negatives to any strategy, however they were informed that the team were mindful of any negatives and how to overcome them. Additionally, it was highlighted that communication was key to prioritise the needs of a family and a child.
- Regarding children in the scheme, it was queried if these children were part of a family unit residing at home. Members were informed that the circumstances of a child varied depending on their individual situation. It



was explained that an issue may stem from a child's family home, from a peer group or local area and this was why the response of the team varied due to the needs of the child and the need for assessment and planning was crucial to provide the appropriate help to a family.

- Members queried if programmes in place with Preston North End and Burnley Football Club specifically targeted young people who may be involved in anti-social behaviour or youth violence and if not whether any strategies would be developed to target young people who may benefit attending these programmes. Members were informed that part of the strategy was about identifying all the support available to young people, for some the Champions Scheme would be appropriate and for others, different schemes would be more appropriate for a young person with other needs. It was highlighted to the committee that the plan and assessment were crucial to make sure a young person would benefit and engage with a programme.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families:

- i. A future agenda item on Youth Violence in Lancashire and what is being done to counteract it (to be considered in context with surrounding authorities), be included on the committee's work programme for 2024/25.
- ii. Regular updates to be provided to the committee on staff recruitment and retention and updates on how the multi-agency system is working, for example through case studies.
- iii. Contact details for local MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) Teams to be shared with the committee.

6. Family Safeguarding Update

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Jacquie Old, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Louise Anderson, Director of Children's Social Care and Brendan Lee, Head of Service, Looked after Children Leaving Care.

The report and presentation circulated with the agenda pack provided an update on the Family Safeguarding Service.

Members were invited to ask questions and a summary is outlined below:

- Members queried why staff retention was poor in social work, it was explained to the committee that social work was a profession that had been on the National Risk List for a prolonged period of time and that social work was renowned for having a high staff turnover rate. The committee heard that over the last 12 months, the turnover rate in



Lancashire County Council had decreased to below 12% in children's social work, which was below the national average. A follow-up question was raised by the committee querying clarification on how the turnover rate was calculated; it was explained to members that the turnover rate was the number of people who left the organisation at any point in their career over a 12-month period, and the formula for calculating this percentage looked at the number of people who had left the organisation and the number of people who joined the organisation over 12 months. Members were informed that in most organisations, the turnover rate for social work was around 15%. It was requested that further information be provided to the committee to explain how the turnover rate was calculated and data to be provided on turnover rates for social workers in Lancashire, benchmarked against local authorities.

- A query was raised regarding whether there was an active strategy in place to recruit from overseas e.g. South Africa. The committee were informed that there had been 2 recruitment campaigns carried out in South Africa, which had aided recruitment in social care. It was explained to members that Childrens' Social Care did not foresee the need to do any further overseas recruit campaigns in the near future.
- It was suggested that data from staff exit interviews could be considered to help explain better why staff may choose to leave the service.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families:

- i. The committee support the service priorities identified for 2024/25 as detailed in the report / supporting presentation.
- ii. Information to be provided to the committee on the formula and method used to calculate staff turnover. Data on turnover rates for social workers in Lancashire to be provided and for this to be benchmarked against local authorities.
- iii. Data from exit interviews to be considered, if possible, to consider why staff leave the service.

7. Education Strategy Update

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided an update on the work of the Lancashire Education Strategy from September 2023 to March 2024.

Members raised the following questions to be circulated to and answered by Aby Hardy, Head of Education Improvement, before the next meeting of the committee:



- Regarding the number of early years children accessing funded 2-year-old places in the last 12 months, it was queried if there was any particular reason why the take up rate was lower in Preston.
- It was queried why the number of permanent exclusions in certain divisions had increased significantly from 2022-23 to 2023-24 in particular in Rossendale and whether this was linked to post Covid.
- Regarding attendance at schools and the pilot for families to shorten leave during school term, it was questioned whether the new approach would be a blanket policy being rolled out or whether individual circumstances would be taken into consideration. The committee commented it was a significant difference to move from a fine to prosecution after 15 days.

Resolved: That the queries raised from the Education Strategy Update be shared with the Head of Education Improvement for a response to be provided to the committee.

8. Work Programme 2023/24

The committee received a report which provided members of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee with the work programme for 2023/24.

A discussion took place on the arrangements for the Deep Dive Session due to take place in April 2024. It was agreed that the Where our Children Live Programme be looked at during a different session.

Resolved: That the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee work programme be noted.

9. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee will be an informal Deep Dive Session to be held on Tuesday 23 April 2024 at 14.00pm in Committee Room 'C' – The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston.

H MacAndrew
Director of Law and Governance

County Hall



Preston

