

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 8th November, 2013 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'B' - The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor Bill Winlow (Chair)

County Councillors

A Barnes	A Schofield
C Dereli	K Snape
R Newman- Thompson	C Wakeford
Mrs L Oades	D Watts
D O'Toole	D Westley
M Parkinson	G Wilkins

County Councillors C Dereli, A Schofield and K Snape replaced County Councillors T Burns, J Shedwick and C Pritchard respectively for this meeting.

1. Apologies

None were received.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 October 2013

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Working Together With Families (WTWF)

The Chair welcomed Paul Hussey, Working Together With Families Co-Ordinator, and, Janette Buckland, Working Together With Families Area Co-Ordinator (North), to the meeting.

The report presented to the Committee was an update regarding implementation of the Working Together With Families approach across Lancashire. The report identified progress to date challenges encountered and associated risks and mitigating actions.

The Working Together With Families (WTWF) strategic work programme was now in its second year and was aimed at increasing the resourcefulness and resilience of families in Lancashire. The emphasis was on working with families, helping them to take greater control over changing their circumstances and improving outcomes for their children and young people.

The work formed part of a wider 'Lancashire Improving Futures Programme' which under the joint leadership of the Lancashire Children and Young People's Trust (LCYPT) and Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB), was working on a number of developments including the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); the creation of multi-agency delivery hubs; further development of integrated working across all districts including bringing together the Early Support and WTWF work streams and a workforce development programme to support the change process.

From March 2012, Lancashire's targets under the national Troubled Families Unit (TFU) work led by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had been included in this programme.

Councillors were invited to ask questions and raise any comments in relation to the report, a summary of which is provided below:

- Members enquired who would be on the Children's Trust. They were informed that the Children's Trust had a core membership including the Lancashire County Council's Children and Young People's Service, a District Support Lead who represented Children and Young People Services on the Children's Trust, representatives from the Lancashire Care Foundation Trust, representatives from housing providers, youth offending teams, and the police. All of the key statutory services were represented on the Children's Trust.
- It was suggested that some organisations from the third sector such as Homestart, could be involved as well. The Committee were informed that liaising with third sector voluntary organisations was crucial to Working Together with Families. There were a number of voluntary organisations involved in the District Local Management Group activities.
- Members felt there was a plethora of organisations and groups involved as well as a lot of meetings. They asked if this worked well and if there was any whistleblowing and if there was any need for early intervention by social workers or the police. It was felt partnerships worked best when everyone came together with a shared aim and task. The feedback on the Working Together With Families approach had been positive with all the organisations working together with a shared aim.
- The families that the WTWF team focussed on were very complex had a great range of difficulties and because of this they were often very suspicious of statutory services and do not engage well with them.

Voluntary community services are vital to the WTWF team in engaging with these families.

- Members mentioned to the WTWF team that the Fire and Rescue Service worked a great deal with children and young people. The Service after attending safety checks in homes, quite often reported to Social Services of situations they had found with young people. Lancashire Fire and Rescue were very active partners in the WTWF approach.
- The problem families in Lancashire tended to be repeat offenders. Working Together With Families was not an organisation it was an approach which meant it was working within the existing services enabling these services to work in a different way with the families as the focus and the focus on the things that mattered most in turning those families around. It was felt that this approach made Working Together With Families much more sustainable in utilising our services. The WTWF approach would have a major impact in reducing the number of repeat offenders. With the development of performance reporting and case studies was having an impact in reducing re-offending. This approach was offering a huge number of opportunities to a wide range of services to relook at what they delivered and made them look more pro-actively at prevention of re-offending.
- Once a family had been identified the WTWF approach worked twofold. There was national criteria and national data for identifying families. This was based on data that was held with the Home Office, police data relating to youth offending and anti-social behaviour, education and schools data, and worklessness data which was held within the Department of Work and Pensions. The WTWF team were allocated a list of families based on this data. Through the District Local Management Groups the WTWF team had committed to ask the questions:
 1. Are these families on your radar?
 2. Are these families the ones expected to be on the list and if not could you identify the ones that should be on the list?

It was twofold in terms of the identification process. Once identified the family was then approached to take part in the WTWF approach. Once the Team had the family's consent The WTWF team called a Team Around The Family which brought together all of the key agencies who worked with the family or potentially could work with the family. The outcome of this meeting could be that a single service intervenes depending upon the incident that has been identified, or it might lead to the identification of a lead professional who would be the family's single point of contact and would co-ordinate services around the family to deliver an agreed family plan. The mantra in Lancashire was one family, one plan, one worker. There were expectations on the family to carry out agreed actions. It was a two way process. The family plan would involve changes to the family's

lifestyle. The ultimate aim was to de-escalate the family either into early support and prevention or into universal services i.e. getting the child back into school. The WTWF team were trying to turn the families around as quickly as possible with their approach.

- There was a budget available to the lead professional for he or she to draw down any urgent funding that was available. This ranged from £250 up to £2500. This could be a range of spot purchases for the family or for referring the family into a particular commission or service that was available and there would be a cost associated with this.
- The WTWF were also developing case studies which highlighted the reduced costs utilising the social return on investment costing tool.
- Members asked if the WTWF team would consider getting involved with people with mental health issues. Mental health was a key factor with families that the WTWF team worked with. The team were working with families where the children were at risk of going into care. The team also worked with families which had offenders or re-offenders.
- For agencies to get involved with families they had to have the families' consent. The Committee asked if there were families that did not give their consent and was there an incentive to get families involved? The Committee was informed that the skill key required was perseverance by the lead professionals. The benefits of participation were also identified to the families and there had been a number of successes in getting families to participate. The lead professional's role was to get to know the families from the inside out and to understand who the key players were in these families. The team did not give up on families that had not given their consent. At the moment the team have managed to hook all targeted families.
- The Committee stated there should be education for young people on parenting. A significant part of the Troubled Families Unit funding, about £600,000 had been utilised in developing a Workforce Development Programme which included training covering the awareness of early support and prevention work and the WTWF approach for frontline staff and managers. The WTWF team recognised the problem of parenting in terms of the investment made.
- Members asked if there was a formal approach where schools had an understanding that they should inform the appropriate authorities on problem families. Schools were in an excellent position to see and understand the problems encountered by these families. The WTWF team was doing a lot of work with schools sector to explain to them what the WTWF approach was about and to see how they could engage and be an active part of the approach as well as being able to support them in

identifying problem families. All of the Local Management Groups had school representatives.

- There was a large amount of good work being done at the Children's Trust level.
- In July Lancashire topped the table of all Local Authorities for positive outcomes achieved with troubled families.

Resolved: That the Committee,

1. Note the content of the report
2. Request an update report in three to six months.

5. Independent Reviewing Officers

The chair welcomed Tony Morrissey, Head of Safeguarding Inspection and Audit, and, Sally Allen, Directorate Safeguarding Manager, to the meeting

In January 2013 the Scrutiny Committee had received a progress report in relation to the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection Action Plan. The Ofsted Inspection report made several references to the valuable role played by IROs in Lancashire, highlighting that child protection conferences and children looked after reviews were effectively chaired and that the IROs were well managed. The report also gave recognition to the contribution made by IROs overall to shape and improve services at both a strategic and individual child level. However, at that time the Scrutiny Committee was advised of the challenges faced by the local authority in relation to the recruitment and retention of IROs, which impacted on IRO caseloads and capacity

The report now presented to the Committee provided a response from the Children and Young People Directorate in relation to the actions taken to improve the recruitment and retention of Independent reviewing Officers (IROs).

The IRO had a critical and unique role, having independent oversight of the child's case, with responsibility for ensuring that the child's interests were protected throughout the care planning process. The appointment of an IRO for children looked after was made a legal requirement under Section 118 of the adoption and Children Act 2012. The role and responsibilities of the IRO were set out in statutory guidance IROs had two distinct functions:

- Chairing the child's review, and
- Monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis

As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also had a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. The IRO should recognise and report on good practice. The IRO manager was required under the statutory guidance to produce an annual report including this information.

At September 2013 the number of children looked after had increased to 1,548, whilst the number of children subject to a child protection plan had increased to 946. There had been an 83% increase in child protection plans from March 2012 to September 2013.

Despite the increase in workload, performance had been maintained at a high level. The IROs were in a unique position, independent from service delivery and with oversight of practice across Children's Social Care. However, in the past there had been an over emphasis on their role in relation to compliance and performance timescales. Development work within the IRO Service had focussed on the IRO responsibilities within the IRO Handbook and the importance of the IRO challenge role. There was evidence that IROs were challenging practice and used the problem resolution process to escalate concerns to Team and Senior Managers. However, rising caseloads were impacting on some aspects of their quality assurance role, particularly in undertaking mid-point reviews checks, to monitor the progression of review recommendations. Lower caseloads would enable this to occur in all cases. In line with the statutory guidance.

Following interviews in September 2013, appointments were made to all IRO vacancies in the team. This include three full-time permanent positions and one full-time temporary post, funded through the adoption Reform Grant. The latter had been agreed as a secondment, subject to the post holder's substantive post being back-filled. It was anticipated that all four staff would be in post by February 2014. Recruitment to the two IRO posts which the Directorate Leadership Team agreed to make permanent, would also be progressed. This would reduce caseloads and based on the current number of children looked after and children subject to a child protection plan, the average IRO caseload would be 96.

Councillors were invited to ask questions and raise any comments in relation to the report, a summary of which is provided below:

- Members asked if there was satisfactory support from the CAMHS Service. They were informed that there had been some excellent service from CAMHS Service and the engagement with regards to families but where this service was not seen this would be where the challenge would come and this was a crucial role for the IROs.. Members mentioned they would like to look at the CAMHS Service in the future.
- The Committee enquired how the different layers of governance worked together. It was a statutory function laid down by government in respect of the Independent Reviewing Service. Everyone was responsible for the quality assurance of the work carried out. There were a range of quality assurance functions that took place in order to assure that the practice

provided was of the highest standard. This role had been established by the government to ensure that its quality assurance took place. The IRO role was not only around quality assurance and challenge but also ensuring that the child's voice is heard as well which was very important in the review process.

- Members enquired if there had been instances of IROS influencing the outcome of a child being returned to its parents. There were many instances where rehabilitation was the best course of action for the child and they would monitor the progression of the rehabilitation. They had to balance the risks of every child with regards going back to its family. The IROs' role was about the best interests of the child and if the best interests of the child was to stay with its family or return to its family then they would pursue this.
- The IROs reported to Ofsted and it was Ofsted who had the responsibility in respect of children's services. In the Safeguarding and Children Looked After Inspection, Ofsted had complimented Lancashire on its annual report.
- Members of the Committee were offered the opportunity to work shadow IRO officers so as to get a better feel of their role and what the role does.
- One of the challenges highlighted was recruitment and retention. Historically Lancashire had faced significant challenges in the recruitment of IROs and this issue was highlighted in the IRO Annual Reports for 2011/12 and 2012/13. The Committee were informed that in the last recruitment campaign in September 2013 all the posts had been filled.
- There had been a significant increase in children subject to the Child Protection Plan and also children looked after. This increase put a lot of pressure on the IROs in terms of caseloads.
- Performance of the IROs was reported to Ofsted. Ofsted scrutinised performance when they came to inspect. The performance that had been achieved by Lancashire had been very positive. It was not just about meeting the performance indicator but also looking at the quality of practice.

Resolved: That a further report be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in a year's time on where the Safeguarding Inspection and Audit Team were in relation to the indicators.

6. Work Plan and Task Group Update

A report was presented to Members summarising the work to be undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee in the coming months, including an update of task group work.

County Councillors Winlow and Barnes had held a meeting with Ian Watson, Head of Cultural Services. Following this meeting he was asked for a report back on the executive response to the Arts Development Report for the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17 January.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Friday 6 December 2013 at 10:30am at County Hall, Preston.

I M Fisher
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall
Preston