

## **Lancashire County Council**

### **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 18th January, 2017 at 4.30 pm  
in Cabinet Room 'C' - The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston**

#### **Present:**

County Councillor Gina Dowding (Chair)

#### **County Councillors**

Mrs S Charles	C Henig
A Cheetham	M Otter
M Dad	D T Smith
G Gooch	

#### **Co-opted members**

Elaine Shinks, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley and  
Rossendale Children's Partnership Board  
Alison Taylor, Fylde and Wyre CCG  
Debra Wilson, Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancs  
Children's Partnership Board

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from County Councillors Lorraine Beavers, Julie Gibson and Sue Pryn.

#### **2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

None were disclosed.

#### **3. Minutes from the meeting held on 7 September 2016**

**Resolved:** The minutes from the meeting held on the 7 September 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the chair.

#### **4. Improvement Board Update**

The Chair welcomed Linda Clegg, Director of Children's Services, to the meeting. The report presented updated the Committee on the actions that had been taken following the 2015 Ofsted inspection. The report included the County Council's self-assessment report as part of the DfE Review.

The rigorous November 2015 inspection from Ofsted of Children's Services had lasted four weeks. The first thing the Department for Education (DfE) did was

appoint an Improvement Advisor, Tony Crane. Children's Services had had an improvement notice served on them and had been given four months to improve.

The Improvement Board was multi agency, had an independent chair and met monthly. It included elected members, young people and frontline practitioners. The Board along with the DfE had signed off an Improvement Plan which responded to 17 Ofsted recommendations.

Ofsted would come in every quarter for an inspection and there was a formal review every six months by the DfE.

The improvement journey for Children's Services was well underway. There was leadership and governance from the DCS, Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, and, the 0 – 25 Programme Board which was chaired by Jo Turton. There was now a three locality model in place and more specialist teams.

There had been an additional 186 appointments to Children's Services and there was a recruitment and retention strategy in place. The biggest issue was around newly qualified workers. Additional development and supervision was needed to ensure that the more inexperienced staff were fully supported. Staff engagement was vital. There were DCS briefings with staff and there was an operational improvement group. Engagement with staff was also done through webpages and multi-agency focus groups which were led by partners on the Improvement Board. There had been a massive investment in technology including SMART phones and upgraded IT equipment for all social workers. In terms of young people there was a young people's improvement group, Professional Personal Advisor (PPA) training and care leaver apprenticeships in place.

A good, robust auditing framework was in place. Children's Services had a refreshed continuum of need and there was an additional social worker capacity in the Contact and Referral Team (CART).

Regarding care leavers, all indicators on the improvement dashboard were in the good or outstanding threshold. The Committee was informed that there was a reduction in caseloads over the last six months. 50% of audits showed practice had improved in the last six months. There was steady progress being made with Ofsted and the DfE. The workforce was committed, engaged and up for the challenge.

One of the priorities for Children's Services was to review and refine its approach to Child in Need, ensure it was working with the right children and there was a strong management oversight in place. A redesign of CART / MASH was being led by Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board. There was lots of work being done around Early Help and demand was soaring. Children's Services must ensure that a robust multi-agency early help offer was in place. Children's Services must work with and learn from other local authorities. Some of the newly qualified workforce was very inexperienced in some teams so there had to be flexible use of experienced staff however it was acknowledged that the staff were the greatest asset.

Members of the Committee were invited to comment and raise questions and a summary of the discussion is set out below:

- Members enquired how caseloads were measured and did new and inexperienced staff have protected caseloads. Managers used their discretion when allocating work around complex cases. Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) staff were always protected in terms of a maximum caseload. In their first year of employment the bar was set at 15 – 18 cases and for the qualified, experienced workers the bar was set at 23 – 25 cases. There was guidance for managers so as to not overburden staff. The Committee requested an update on caseloads for the last quarter of 2016.
- Members felt Children's Services was moving in the right direction. To continue improving the right systems had to be in place and officers had to get up to speed with the processes that were now in place.
- The Committee enquired how the outcomes for children were measured, what the indicators were, and when did the Team start measuring if children had better outcomes. In the early months the outcomes would not yet be seen until all the new systems were in place. Nothing would change for children until this happened. Systems for reviewing, assessing and intervening were needed before outcomes could be measured.
- It was vital to keep the same care worker with the care leavers. Continuity of the same care worker made a massive difference. The only time there would not be continuity was if the care worker was ill or had left their job.
- It was pointed out that when Child in Need cases were reviewed, 16% of the cases were escalated into child protection and 26% of the cases were closed which meant that nearly half of the Children in Need were not correctly categorised. Children in Need were not reviewed until recently as other children were. In other areas of categorisation, Child Protection for example, had an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). There was an independent challenge and scrutiny on Children in Need. IROs reviewed all the Children in Public Care as well. Children in Need were the group of children just below these categories. There was a more formal approach to Children in Need now. There will be formal, proper reviews now just like the other categories.
- Concerns were expressed regarding social workers being relied on to work more hours than they were being paid for. Caseloads had much improved and were not as bad as they used to be but demand was still increasing. There was also a social worker health survey every year. The Committee was informed that around 70% of social workers were working additional hours.

**Resolved:** The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee received and commented on the report and the actions taken following the inspection. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee also considered where it could add value to the work of the Improvement Board.

## **5. Support to Care Leavers**

The Chair welcomed Peter Knowles, Senior Manager Children's Services, and, Jane Hylton, Leading Care Manager Children's Services, to the meeting. They presented a report which outlined what social, emotional and practical support was provided to care leavers and what action had been taken following the Ofsted inspection in September/October 2015 which found services to care leavers to be inadequate. It outlined the change in service delivery with the development of a discrete service for care leavers and provided an outline of ongoing work to continue to improve services to care leavers. The report also provided information on improved performance against national performance indicators and again outlined plans in place for continued improvement and the role of the local authority as corporate parents and how it was exercising this function.

It was acknowledged prior to the Ofsted inspection by Children's Social Care Management Team that services to care leavers needed improving. As a result it engaged in Phase 2 of the New Belongings Programme in March 2015 with this concluding in March 2016.

The New Belongings Programme set out 5 core components to achieve its aims in improving services and outcomes to care leavers:

1. Survey local care leavers to understand to understand priorities of improvement – a questionnaire had been sent out and 101 care leavers had completed it highlighting improvements needed such as better preparation for leaving care, information on Rights and Entitlements, better access to their leaving care workers Personal Advisors (PAs) and support.
2. Conduct a review of the role of Personal Advisors – 3 Professional Personal Advisor (PPA) teams had been created in the North, Central and the East.
3. Establish a forum of care leavers to help the authority in shaping decisions about changes to services.
4. Prepare and plan for improvement based on understanding of local needs gained from the three previous steps.
5. Obtain the support of senior leadership.

The methodology behind the New Belongings Programme was involving care leavers to improve the service.

Members of the Committee were invited to comment and raise questions and a summary of the discussion is set out below:

- The reason for Fylde and Wyre being chosen as the pilot for the Care Leavers Scheme was as the area displayed the most challenges. Staff turnaround was greater in the area and overall practice was not as strong as other areas.
- The Government was proposing this year to keep all care cases open until the age of 25 was reached. At the moment statutorily a case would be closed at the age of 21 unless the person had gone to university. If this proposal went ahead there was a potential projection of 450 young people to work with over the next 3 years. Over 5 years the projected number was around 700 young people.
- Regarding the three localities, the East had the highest demand. In response to the question around the number of BME care leavers Committee was informed that the numbers of BME young people was not that high.
- Members stated that there needed to be an equality of work across the County and a consistency of support.
- It was pointed out that the Employment Support Team was not managed by Children Social Care, their role was to get young people within the County involved in education and employment training. The Employment Support Team was a LCC function and was funded by Early Help.
- Foster carers had an important role in supporting care leavers. It was vital to give more encouragement to foster parents.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the actions taken since the Ofsted inspection and the improvements made. It furthermore agreed its commitment to the care leavers pledge and their role as corporate parents in promoting the welfare of care leavers.

## **6. Fostering Sub-Group**

At the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 7 September 2016 members were advised that the marketing to support carers recruitment would benefit from a review from the Committee to identify other potential resources which could be used and how the influence of the Committee could support the marketing and promotion of foster caring.

In addition it was suggested by the Corporate Director of Operations and Delivery that it may be of benefit to look at the overall issue of fostering in different ways by identifying additional support requirements such as a respite model or where

there were those who would like to become a foster carer but unable to do so on a full time basis to agree to work and support young people to stay with family.

It transpired that the Committee was only able to resource one sub group and therefore the original issue relating to the promotion of fostering was taken forward. It was agreed that the second suggestion would be progressed at a later date.

This work of the Sub-Group was mainly looking at how Councillors and the County Council in its role as a public sector organisation could use its leverage in promoting fostering services to recruit more foster carers.

Many organisations had been contacted in the public sector, the private sector and the voluntary sector and the general response was that they would be willing to promote good foster care and LCC's service. Research had also taken place with other councils. What was discovered by the Sub-Group was that there was a number of different ways in engaging with the promotion of fostering which was of minimal cost to the Council

**Resolved:**

1. The Committee approved the report of the Fostering Sub-Group
2. The Committee agreed to a second sub-group proposed at the meeting on 7 September to progress separately and discussions to take place between the Chair of CSSC, the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Corporate Director of Operations and Delivery to agree the most appropriate way forward.

**7. Work Plan**

Wendy Broadley, Scrutiny Officer, presented the Committee with the work plan which included sub-group work undertaken.

Committee was informed that officers from the Fostering and Adoption Team would be attending the April meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to provide a formal response to the Fostering Sub-Group report.

There was also a training session being delivered on 6<sup>th</sup> February by the Centre for Public Scrutiny supported by the Local Government Association. An invitation for this had gone out to all members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, the Education Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Board.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted and commented on the work plan.

**8. Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business declared.

**9. Date of the Next Meeting**

Next meeting of the Committee to take place on the 1 March 2017 at 4.30pm,  
Cabinet Room C, County Hall, Preston.

I Young  
Director of Governance, Finance  
and Public Services

County Hall  
Preston