

## **Lancashire County Council**

### **Scrutiny Committee**

#### **Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 13th April, 2012 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'B' - County Hall, Preston**

#### **Present:**

County Councillor John Shedwick (Chair)

#### **County Councillors**

S Chapman	P Malpas
Mrs F Craig-Wilson	D O'Toole
C Crompton	Mrs L Oades
M Devaney	V Taylor
K Ellard	D Westley
Mrs J Hanson	B Winlow

#### **1. Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

None were disclosed.

#### **2. Minutes of the Meetings held on 9 and 30 March 2012**

It was reported that County Councillor Westley had been omitted from the attendance record on the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2012.

**Resolved:** That, subject to the inclusion of County Councillor Westley's attendance on the 9 March 2012 the minutes of the meetings held on 9 and 30 March 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

#### **3. Safeguarding children and young people in Lancashire**

The Chair welcomed Helen Denton, Executive Director for Children and Young People, and Tony Morrissey, Head of Safeguarding Inspection and Audit, to the meeting.

The Committee received a report on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in Lancashire. The report also included details of internal scrutiny arrangements and the findings and judgements from recent inspections carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). A performance report in relation to key safeguarding measures was also presented. The Committee also received an update on the progress made against the recommendations of the meeting held on 9 December 2011 in relation to children looked after placed across boundaries.

With regard to the recent Ofsted inspection, it was reported that the inspectors had concluded that Lancashire's safeguarding and looked after children services were "good with outstanding features" judgement. There had been a significant focus on safeguarding arrangements, with many changes being implemented and additional resources committed. The inspection had also confirmed the council's own assessment of its services provided. The Executive Director praised the work carried out by staff on delivering safeguarding arrangements.

The Committee noted that the county council did not rely on the use of agency staff on delivering its services in relation to safeguarding arrangements. The council's social workers were trained in-house and their caseloads were continuously monitored.

The Committee was informed that the Head of Safeguarding Inspection and Audit's responsibilities were to ensure that services provided were robust and of the highest quality. It was reported that the council had undertaken a range of mock inspections across Lancashire involving frontline staff, families and service managers. Similar exercises had also been undertaken in relation to fostering and adoption services. Recognition of this innovative work internally had been far-reaching in that the council had been approached to undertake similar mock inspections for other authorities such as Warrington Borough Council.

The Committee noted that the small audit team was also responsible for monitoring certain human resources functions such as ensuring that recruitment and selection procedures were robust.

In relation to the safeguarding and quality assurance framework and the continued improvement of services, officers alongside the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) had chosen to focus their attention on the issue of neglect. It was decided that rather than investigate the issue from a quantitative perspective they would instead consider it from a qualitative approach carrying out interviews with parents and children and frontline staff. Questionnaires had also been distributed to staff across the directorate including School staff. Officers were currently assessing the outcomes of their findings and to determine when the council would need to intervene in a timely way. The Committee was informed that the council was hoping to host a conference on neglect in June/July to look at how this issue can be tackled across Lancashire.

A number of peer reviews had also taken place which focused on learning from practitioners and the sharing of best practice. Officers recognised that there were a number of areas in which they could improve on service delivery and would take such matters as outlined in the inspection report forward.

The Committee noted that the council would not be inspected in the next year and that the next unannounced inspection would take place in two to three years' time. The report also highlighted that the council's overview and scrutiny committees provided robust scrutiny of children's safeguarding services. Whilst the inspection report judged the council's services as good with outstanding features the Committee was reassured that the council would continue to improve and ensure that vulnerable groups were appropriately safeguarded. However, the

council recognised that there were some significant recommendations related to health matters in the report and that the Committee should consider how it might wish to monitor progress.

Councillors were offered the opportunity to shadow staff in their safeguarding roles.

The Chair congratulated the work of staff in the Children and Young People Directorate and on receiving a positive inspection report. The Chair was also pleased to see that the work of the overview and scrutiny committees had been acknowledged in the report. The Chair suggested that the Chairs and deputies of the three Scrutiny Committees determine which matters to take forward from the report and to update their workplans accordingly.

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

- On social workers, one councillor asked how their workloads were managed and what powers they had to remove children. The Committee was informed that a sophisticated caseload management system was in place to monitor workloads. It was also explained that experience would dictate the caseload given to an employee. Practitioners were also on hand to monitor and mentor staff and to promote best practice. With regard to social workers' powers there were a number of methods to which they could apply to intervene such as emergency protection orders. However, with any method, they would have to be able to demonstrate that there was just reason to remove a child.
- One councillor enquired as to whether any developments had been made in relation to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH). The Committee was informed that a pilot operation had begun in Preston with a view to rolling out the approach across Lancashire. The concept which had originally started in Devon and Cornwall would involve a team of police, social care and health representatives to assist in the sign-posting and co-ordination of services in situations involving vulnerable children.
- Concern was expressed regarding areas for improvement in particular those relating to health matters. Concern was also expressed about the degree of accountability of the local health service, and how they could be encouraged to address the concerns of the CQC. The Committee was informed that the Executive Director worked closely with senior colleagues in the NHS and that meetings between the Executive Director and the Chief Executive of NHS Lancashire were also held on a regular basis.
- Members asked about private care homes and the council's level of control or influence over their operation. It was recognised that there was no general concern about the quality of private care and that Lancashire's private care provision was generally of a very high quality. It was explained that private care homes were registered and subject to Ofsted inspection.
- On the "Who cares?" report, the Committee was informed that progress in relation to the areas identified for action by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 December 2011 were set out on page 19 of the agenda.

- Members drew attention to a piece of scrutiny work recently carried out on adult safeguarding, which raised concerns that those agencies involved were not communicating with each other. It was felt that the MASH concept being developed in relation to children's safeguarding could be a positive way forward.

**Resolved:** That;

- i. The report and the arrangements in place to ensure children and young people are safeguarded be noted;
- ii. The present internal and external arrangements in place to monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements across Lancashire be noted;
- iii. The judgement by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in respect to their recent inspection of Lancashire's safeguarding and looked after children services be noted;
- iv. The Chairs and deputies of the three Scrutiny Committees meet to determine which matters to take forward from the report and to update their workplans accordingly.

#### **4. Task Group Updates**

The Committee received an update on current task groups and their proposed completion dates. It was reported that the Arts Funding Task Group would be formulating its recommendations at its next meeting. It was hoped that the final report of the task group would be presented to the Committee at its meeting in June.

**Resolved:** That the update on existing task groups be noted.

#### **5. Recent and Forthcoming Decisions**

The committee considered recent relevant decisions made and also forthcoming decisions including those set out in the current Forward Plan.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

#### **6. Workplan 2012/13**

The workplan for the committee was presented for noting and comments. The Chair gave an outline of the work to be carried out by the Committee over the coming months including the additional work agreed earlier in the meeting.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

**7. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 11 May 2012 at 10:00am at County Hall, Preston. On behalf of the Committee, County Councillor Ellard, Deputy Chair, thanked the Chair for his chairmanship of the Committee over the past three years.

I M Fisher  
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall  
Preston