

Minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 2 March 2016 at 10:00 am in the Elisabeth Room, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Graham Newman (Chairman), Sonia Barker (Vice Chairman), Helen Armitage, Nick Barber, Peter Beer, James Crossley, Mary Evans, Penny Otton, David Ritchie, Bryony Rudkin, Joanna Spicer and Andrew Stringer.

Statutory Co-opted members present: Mark Dunn, Rachel Gooch, Paul McIntee (Roman Catholic Diocese) and Jane Sheat (Church of England Diocese).

Also present: Councillors Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills and Stephen Burroughes, Member with Special Responsibility for Children in Care

Supporting officers present: Paul Banjo (Scrutiny Officer) and Susan Cassedy (Democratic Services Officer).

30. Public Participation Session

There were no public speakers.

31. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were no apologies for absence.

32. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

33. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

Minute 21, Public Participation Session, first paragraph, fifth line: replace 'Ms Ewart' with 'Ms Coomber'.

Minutes 23 and 26, under Declaration of Interest and Dispensations: replace 'Paul McGINtee' with 'Paul McIntee'.

34. Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

At Agenda Item 5 the Committee considered the outcomes of the Ofsted Inspection Report that was published on 11 February 2016.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Sue Cook, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

Allan Cadzow, Deputy Director and Lead for Early Help

Graham Beamish, Head of Programmes, CYP

Cliff James, Head of Corporate Parenting

Sally Stoker, Head of Service, Adoption

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Member with Special Responsibility for Children in Care.

Recommendation: The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, and the Director of Children and Young People's Services, to note and take account of the following comments and suggestions from the Committee in formulating the Council's Action Plan in response to the Ofsted report:

- i) staff, Members and partner organisations were to be congratulated for the good work that Ofsted have recognised in their inspection report;
- ii) Councillors would welcome opportunities to meet staff working in their localities and to appreciate their good work;
- iii) continue the engagement with Leeds, the Eastern Regional network and other councils to learn from best practice with a view to improving the rating for both 'Children who needed help and protection' and for 'Experiences and progress of care leavers'.
- iv) further develop the use of peer audits, to get the culture embedded in the organisation.
- v) with regard to the educational performance at Key Stage 4 of looked after young people,
 - a) undertake further modelling to identify trends and causes of the downturn in outcomes in 2015, in the light of Suffolk's generally upward trends;
 - b) consider further integration of the virtual school and children in care endeavours with SCC's Education & Learning services; and
 - c) seek learning from schools' case studies regarding KS4 care leavers.
- vi) accelerate the pace of deployment of digital tools; examine the merits of making one-off investment on the IT and care management system to achieve the goals of providing suitable technology to support the workforce and integration of numerous sources of data;
- vii) redouble efforts with partners, in particular schools and academies, to embed the multi-agency strategy on neglect, to ensure effective and early action in cases where neglect is established of children and young people; and

- viii) ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) addresses the Ofsted recommendations, including regarding the systematic use of cross-agency data to inform service and demand planning.

Reason for recommendation:

- i) The Committee recognised the hard work that Staff, Members and partner organisations had carried out in order to achieve the 'Good' Ofsted rating.
- ii) Committee Members wanted to meet with those staff within their localities that work hard to achieve the good results and to congratulate them in person on their achievement.
- iii) The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills stated that he recognised the issues surrounding the ratings for the work around care leavers. He advised that Leeds County Council's rating had gone up from 'Inadequate' to 'Good' and that he had visited Leeds the previous week to look at the Council's ways of working which could be used in Suffolk.

Officers also advised that there was a very strong regional network and they would like to visit more local authorities with a 'Good' rating however, there had only been one since May 2015, they would however explore this further.

The Committee wished to encourage, and recognised the value of, visiting other Councils to identify good practice.

- iv) The Committee was advised that all auditing was now carried out alongside individual members of staff and that the Council was looking to develop peer audits as it was recognised that more could be done to use these as a training opportunity. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills added that he had been involved in a couple of peer audits and agreed that more work could be done in order to embed this culture.
- v) Officers advised that the downturn of educational performance at Key Stage 4 of looked after young people involved a small cohort which changed quickly and was not currently a sustained trend. A system was in place to identify those children at risk and to intervene but this would not necessarily meet the needs of the whole group. Officers confirmed that the Council was carrying out more modelling, identifying those with specific needs and looking at the schools' predictions to see if they were realistic or not, the outcome of which would inform the action plan. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills added that the Council was to analyse why this was an increasing trend and whether it was likely to be a continuing problem and if so, how to deal with it. The Virtual School Lead was charged with redesigning the team and to develop education fostering champions who would work with foster carers to raise their skill and knowledge level.
- vi) The Committee noted Ofsted's Recommendation 9 "Increase the pace of change in implementing improved IT and recording systems to

support practitioners in recording and evidencing work and outcomes” and officers were asked if this was due to an increase in the pace of technology or if it was due to resource or training issues. Officers advised that it was recognised that there had been no material investment in IT systems and that the issues with client data bases had not been resolved. There was a need to consolidate systems to allow for a culture change in the way IT systems were used in order for practitioners to have easily accessible information on children and to be able to spend more time with families. Staff were issued with laptops and there were plans to roll out smart phones however, this would not resolve the problem with Broadband and wireless connectivity in the County.

- vii) Officers advised that the Council did already have a multi-agency strategy to tackle neglect but had decided not to make an issue of recommendation 10 with Ofsted as it was not yet fully embedded.
- viii) The Committee raised concern regarding the LSCB’s quality and level of cross agency data and it not being systematically used. The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills assured the Committee that any recommendations made by the Committee would be aired and fully discussed by the LSCB and taken on board. Officers advised that the aim was to develop a good practice tool which all agencies wanted to use. The work to identify the areas where the neglect practice was really good would be rolling out in the next few months including practitioner workshop taking place around the county.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None received.

35. Foster Carers

At Agenda Item 6 the Committee considered the Council’s Foster Carers Scheme, following implementation of the new Foster Care Allowances and Fees Scheme that was approved at Cabinet on 16 June 2015.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills

Sue Cook, Corporate Director of Children and Young People’s Services

Allan Cadzow, Deputy Director and Lead for Early Help

Graham Beamish, Head of Programmes, CYP

Cliff James, Head of Corporate Parenting

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Member with Special Responsibility for Children in Care.

Sally Stoker, Head of Service, Adoption

Recommendation: The Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Cabinet, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services,

Education and Skills, and the Director of Children and Young People's Services, to:

- i) request that all councillors support publicising the Council's fostering campaign, including at town & parish council meetings and community events & meetings;
- ii) ensure that councillors have access to a pack of information, including the new material, posters, literature and website to be launched in April, the link to the YouTube video clip shown to the committee, and the SCC and Fostering service Facebook pages;
- iii) consider promotion opportunities via school governing bodies, eg. information in Governors magazine.
- iv) engage with district and borough councils to agree an arrangement for prompt assessment of people who require larger social housing accommodation in order to become foster carers, taking account of the outcomes of the detailed assessment process;
- v) engage with Suffolk public sector leaders and with schools to look at the cost benefits of joint commissioning of foreign language / interpreter services, and also consider alternative face-to-face interpreter options including the possibility of direct employment;
- vi) consider additional specialised support and encouragement for carers who may be able to accommodate Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children; and.
- vii) provide additional information for the Committee regarding the numbers (not percentages) of children and young people looked after by independent foster carers, carers outside the county, in neighbouring authorities, and 'at a distance'.

Reason for recommendation:

- i), ii) & iii) Officers had stressed the importance of all councillors becoming ambassadors of the Fostering Campaign and helping in its promotion. Officers advised that out of every 100 people who gave thought to becoming a foster carer only 10 would actually apply. Therefore it was vital that every opportunity was taken to encourage people to think about becoming a foster carer via all those routes as listed in recommendations i) to iii) above.
- iv) The Committee had noted the issue that some families who lived in social housing accommodation were unable to become foster parents due to requiring a larger property but were not eligible for a larger property until they became foster parents.
- v) The Committee noted that commissioning interpreters was very expensive and wished for officers to look into joint commissioning with other public sector organisations. Officers advised that the range of different languages spoken by unaccompanied asylum seeking children could be too large and expensive for the Council to employ its own in-house interpreters.

- vi) The Committee noted the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the County and the specialist support they required. Officers advised that there were foster carers who did like to specialise in caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- viii) The Committee wished to receive clarification on figures referred to in paragraph 3.3 of the report which provided numbers of those children in Suffolk fostering service placements and externally purchased placements and how those figures were broken down.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None received.

36. Children's Centres

At Agenda Item 7 the Committee considered the effect so far of the changes to the Children's Centres that were agreed by Cabinet in 2015.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Sue Cook, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

Allan Cadzow, Deputy Director and Lead for Early Help

Graham Beamish, Head of Programmes, CYP

Anita Farrant, Head of Service Early Help

Anna Shaw, Early Help Service Manager, West Area

Hannah Seymour, Children's Centre Manager

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Member with Special Responsibility for Children in Care.

Officers corrected an error in the Table on page 72, which should have read 'Aug 2015-Jan 2016'

Recommendation: The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, and the Director of Children and Young People's Services, to:

- i) when referring to Children's Centres, to make clear the locality in which they are situated, and to make the distinction between the references to registration areas, the children's centre and the physical buildings;
- ii) provide additional information for the Committee regarding the service engagement data across all of the Suffolk children's centres, and also the 'run rate' of crisis intervention at each centre;
- iii) in order to be able to measure the effect of any future building closures, to reflect on the statistics being collected both before and after closures; and

- iv) provide additional information for the Committee for its Information Bulletin, to explain the term “registration reach area” associated with each of the Children’s Centres, including a map.

Reason for recommendation:

- i),ii) & iv) The Committee had experienced some difficulty in interpreting the information provided in the report and by the witnesses and wished to receive further information which would enable it to clarify those issues highlighted in recommendations i) to ii) above.
- iii) So that the consequences on registrations; casual/informal visits to centres; take up of programmed events; and crisis interventions (eg debt/domestic violence/relationship breakdown) could be more clearly understood. The Committee had also noted some written input from Lighthouse Women’s Aid.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None received.

37. Information Bulletin

The Committee noted the information bulletin at Agenda Item 8.

38. Key Decision Forward Plan and Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Due to the meeting running over time the Committee agreed to consider its forward work programme at its next informal workshop.

39. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 1.35 pm.

Chairman

