

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 14 April 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor M Mutton (Chair)
Councillor S Bains
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor J Lepoidevin
Councillor C Miks
Councillor H Noonan
Councillor P Seaman

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Cabinet Members and
Deputy Cabinet Members: Councillor D Kershaw
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor S Thomas

Employees (by Directorate):

J Gregg, People Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
G Lewis, Chief Executive's Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate
H Walker, People Directorate
S Watson, People Directorate

Apologies: Councillor N Akhtar and J O'Boyle
K Jones and R Potter

Public Business

69. Declarations of Interests

There were no discloseable pecuniary interest.

70. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th March, 2016 were approved.

Further to Minute 51/15 'Selection, Nomination and Removal of Local Authority Governors' Members noted that they would receive further information about governor appointments following the election.

Further to Minute 63/15 'Serious Case Review – Child C' Members had received information requested about the Serious Case Review.

71. Serious Case Review - Child E

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Serious Case Review Co-ordinator for Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards, which detailed the outcome of the Serious Case Review (SCR) relating to Child E, which was appended to the briefing note. A SCR was undertaken when the abuse or neglect of a child was known or suspected and the child had died. The briefing note highlighted that the primary aim of a SCR was to help agencies learn lessons from these events, and to use this experience to improve practice.

Each agency may make recommendations to support improvements in practice within their organization. The on-going implementation and monitoring of these actions was the responsibility of the individual agency. Evidence of progress was regularly provided for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). This process enabled the LSCB to fulfill its responsibility for monitoring progress, and to be assured that the recommendations had been delivered in practice. Recommendations that were multi-agency were the responsibility of the LSCB, and an action plan to address these recommendations was currently being progressed.

Following the death of Child E in May, 2014 the Independent Chair of LSCB at that time agreed this case should be the subject of a Serious Case Review in July, 2014. Child E was a five-month old baby who died after he was found unconscious in a bed co-sleeping with adults following a party at his family home. At the time of his death there were indications of drug use, cannabis cultivation in the property, poor home conditions, possible neglect and domestic violence in connection with the family. The family were not open to specialist services at the time of Child E's death and there had not been significant concerns identified prior to his death. There was therefore concern as to whether previous contacts had correctly identified, assessed and acted on any risks, or offered support to the family, to mitigate the issues that became apparent at death.

The SCR report detailed the independence of the review, the family, circumstances surrounding the death and issues for consideration which included:

- The context for family support and child care in the wider family circle – How were the children supervised and their safety ensured?
- Home conditions in which the children were living – did these raise concerns for their welfare and safety?
- Opportunities to observe and assess the levels of care and support and possible risks of neglect, through contact with the family and particularly home visits
- Why the family did not access greater early help and support from children's centres and pre-school settings?
- What was known about any episodes of domestic violence, substance misuse or criminal activity that might have indicated safeguarding risks for the children?
- Were there aspects of the medical and home care required by Child E's sister for her health condition that may have affected the care provided to other children?
- What aspects of previous contact with members of this family might have indicated any needs for the children?

- Were there opportunities for the concerns that have led to the subsequent creation of child protection plans to be identified or shared between agencies at an earlier stage?

The recommendations were that the Coventry LSCB should:

1. Seek assurance that the arrangements for each GP practice to have a named health visitor for regular and consistent contact, provides for the accurate and timely sharing of information about families in need.
2. Request the Birmingham Children's Hospital Foundation Trust to review the work of the Family Support Workers to ensure that they proactively engage with families attending for ongoing medical treatment, and record clearly what offers of support have been made and explored.
3. Promote multiagency training on the combination of early risk factors that can arise for families and how these can be better recognised and assessed and incorporate the learning from this case in developing better awareness of early risk factors, neglect and accessing early help.
4. Review the evidence of awareness by parents of the risks of co-sleeping, and where there are seen to be gaps, develop effective communication strategies about the risks and dangers, addressing both professional audiences and parents/families.
5. Ensure that school attendance policies and guidance for all schools promote a more rigorous questioning of the reasons for absence, and that where medical reasons are provided these are explored to ensure that the family is receiving the best possible support to encourage attendance.

Janet Mokades, current Independent Chair of the LSCB attended the meeting and presented the recommendations and discussed the action plan and was supported by Hardeep Walker, the Serious Case Review Co-ordinator for Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards. They discussed work with GP's, multiagency training, co-sleeping and school attendance.

Councillor M Mutton, Chair of the Scrutiny Board reminded Members that their role was not to re-hear the review, but to scrutinize the recommendations and review them, bearing in mind that policies had moved on since April, 2014.

The Scrutiny Board discussed the following concerns with the Chair of the LSCB:

- Press coverage of the case and the role of the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service
- School attendance procedure's
- Similar recommendations identified in different SCR's and how recommendations are monitored
- Communication of co-sleeping information to parents
- Partner's different policies, communication and priorities
- Professional curiosity, judgment, subjectivity and tolerance levels

Councillor M Mutton noted that quality of practice was on the Scrutiny Board work programme for next municipal year and the recommendations from the Serious Case Reviews considered this year would also be reviewed.

RESOLVED that :

- 1) The Scrutiny Board recommend that the Cabinet Member for Education audit attendance policies and procedures in schools and how absences are followed up**
- 2) A letter be written to West Midlands Police to provide reassurance that measures are in place to address the technical errors reported**
- 3) Sleep safe application launch information be shared with Members of the Scrutiny Board**

72. Children's Social Care Performance Report Two Year Comparison 2014/5 and 2015/6

The Scrutiny Board noted a report on Children's Social Care Performance from 2014/15 to 2015/16 and the Re-Referral Action Note, requested previously by the Board, was tabled.

The Performance on the following areas was detailed in the report:

- Common Assessment Framework's (CAFs)
- Contacts to Children's Services
- Contact outcomes
- New Referrals and Re-Referrals
- Children and Families Assessment Timeliness
- Children subject to a strategy discussion
- Timeliness of completion of section 47 enquiries and outcomes
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) data
- Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) timeliness, participation and RAG rating
- New Child Protection plans and repeat plans per month
- Review Child Protection Conference (RCPCs) timeliness
- Children entering Care and previously looked after per month
- Legal status on entry to care
- Children entering care by age
- Children currently looked after and number dual registered
- Children Looked After: Placement Type and stability
- Children Looked After Timescales
- Care Leaver Status
- Pathway Plans and demographics
- Missing Children
- Caseloads
- Fostering Scorecard
- Adoption Scorecard

The Scrutiny Board discussed the following issues with the Cabinet Members and officers:

- The number of children experiencing more than 3 placement moves
- Analysis from return home interviews after children have been 'missing'
- Children entering care age 17+
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers
- The implications of the development of a Regional Adoption Board
- The number of children entering Care without an Order

Officers agreed to provide further information to Members on the following:

1. Analysis of Barnardos return home interviews
2. An update of the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum to be supported by Coventry
3. The increasing number of children who have had 3 or more placements
4. The Regional Adoption Board
5. The age breakdown for children entering care without an order (section 20)

73. Recommendations from the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Supervision of Social Work Staff

Further to Minute 2/15 the Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Supervision of Social Work Staff. The report made recommendations that would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People at the rising of the Scrutiny Board meeting.

The Ofsted inspection of Children's Services undertaken in February and March 2014 identified serious weakness in the supervision of staff.

"Social workers do not always receive the right level of supervision from their managers to enable them to discuss cases fully and make the right decisions for children and young people, to improve their outcomes and ensure their safety and welfare."

Improvements to supervision of social work staff were included in the improvement notice issued by the DfE on 20 June 2014 and included in the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

The Task and Finish Group met four times to look in detail at the work that had already been done to improve supervision of staff, talk to existing managers and analyse information from a staff supervision survey undertaken in 2014 and 2015, to be able to identify other areas of improvement.

The membership of the group was:

- Cllr Bains

- Cllr Bigham
- Cllr Lepoidevin
- Cllr Mal Mutton (Chair)
- Cllr Seaman

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People was recommended to instruct officers:

1. To update the Supervision Policy to take into account the following:
 - a. That regular sample audits of supervision be undertaken to monitor both quality and quantity of supervision.
 - b. The quality control section of the Supervision Policy reflects Members' oversight
 - c. That supervision training is part of the induction for new managers.
 - d. That reflective supervision is used as a standard part of regular supervision session.
 - e. That children's views and wishes are discussed and these discussions are recorded during supervision sessions
2. To ensure the updated supervision policy is implemented and complied with across the whole service.
3. That all managers with casework responsibility to have received recent supervision training within 6 months, then all managers across the service within 12 months.
4. That a statement of intent regarding levels of caseloads is developed.
5. That good practice is identified and shared across the service, not just teams.
6. That within 3 months all staff to have a supervision agreement.
7. That Research In Practice to be promoted to all staff to make use of current research and evidence to inform their practice.
8. That annual appraisals, using the Council's behaviours framework are undertaken alongside monthly supervision sessions.
9. That a staff survey is undertaken on an annual basis to enable oversight of the impact and implementation of the policies and practice across Children's Services.

The Scrutiny Board thanked Members and officers involved in the Task and Finish Group. Officers were also appreciative of scrutiny support.

RESOLVED that the recommendations be endorsed and that Scrutiny maintain oversight on progress against the recommendations, with a report in 6 months and 12 months, including any changes in performance.

74. **Improvement Board Progress Report from 30 March, 2016**

Further to Minute 66/15 the Scrutiny Board noted a joint briefing note which detailed progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan, reported to the Children's Services Improvement Board on 30th March, 2016 based on data from February, 2016.

The progress report included an update on the six themes aligned to the Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Notice including an update on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the improvement journey was ongoing and key challenges were increasing the number of social workers and improving the quality of practice.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and officers on the following:

- Analysis of the information contained in return home interviews to understand patterns and trends in respect of missing children and to ensure performance is robust
- The Minister's letter regarding the outcome of the 18 month review in February, 2016
- Recruitment and retention
- Reducing use of Agency staff and promoting a 'good supportive' offer at Coventry Council
- Publishing what we do well at Coventry Council
- Communication with Members

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People was very supportive of the Scrutiny Board investigating ways to improve the stability of the workforce.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and a Task and Finish Group be established to investigate recruitment and retention of Social Workers, to try to improve the stability of the workforce.

75. **Work Programme and Review of 2015/16 Scrutiny Activity**

The Scrutiny Board reviewed the 2015/16 municipal year and felt that the following areas had been successful:

- Task and Finish Group on Supervision of Social Work Staff
- Improvement Board Updates
- Local Authority Governors
- President Kennedy Visit

The Scrutiny Board suggested work programme items for next municipal year including:

- White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* 'Academisation' implications

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) young people and drug use
- Commissioned Services including Barnados
- Residential Care
- Wisteria Lodge Review

RESOLVED that the successes be recorded in the Annual Scrutiny Report and the suggestions for next municipal year be considered on the work programme, by the Scrutiny Board in the new municipal year.

76. **Any Other Business**

Thank you

Councillor M Mutton thanked all the Members of the Scrutiny Board for their contributions this municipal year and especially those who would not be around next year.

On behalf of the Members of Scrutiny Board (2) Cllr Mrs Bigham thanked Cllr Mutton for chairing the meetings this year.

(Meeting closed at 4.00 pm)