

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 15 September 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor M Mutton (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor S Bains
Councillor D Gannon
Councillor D Kershaw
Councillor M Lapsa
Councillor A Lucas
Councillor P Male
Councillor C Miks

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson

Deputy Cabinet Member: Councillor P Seaman

Employees (by Directorate):

J Gregg, People Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate

Apologies: Councillor K Maton and E Ruane
K Jones and R Potter

Public Business

15. Declarations of Interests

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th June, 2016 were approved.

With regard to minute 9/16 'Serious Case Review' Councillor Male recalled asking about Ofsted during the discussion about improvements to information recorded in Children's Services.

17. 'Stepping Up' and 'Stepping Down' Process for Social Care Cases

Further to Minute 63/15 the Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Director of Children's Services regarding the impact of the lack of step up/down between Early Help and Children Social Care. On-going work had been undertaken to align more closely the work of Early Help and Children Social Care, as part of the step up/down model which was re-introduced in April 2016.

The Process was that where the needs of families change and risk escalated or reduced a process to step up or step down cases between early help and social

care existed. This meant that those families who required on-going involvement from specialist services but did not require a statutory intervention were able to have support via this service. The process included a “warm handover” so the family were introduced to a new worker from the Children and Families First team by the exiting the social worker.

Service Managers from both Social Care and Early Help had been heavily involved in mapping new processes – to ensure any changes aligned to operational management and performance reporting. A flow chart to support movement of work from the social care neighbourhoods was attached to the report.

The briefing note reported on performance and overall step downs and conversions into Early Help and Prevention had increased. There were systematic processes and systems that were understood by social care colleagues in particular Referral and Assessment, and MASH, for example, from June 2016 there had been 807 diversions from contacts and 205 step downs. A quarterly review would ensure new practice was embedded with staff on the ground, ensuring that children who did not need a statutory intervention were fully supported in by Early Help and Prevention services.

The policy was last updated in 2012, a new policy would be written in November 2016 to reflect the changes and updated in the electronic policy and procedures manual used by all staff. The current policy had been used to support further work at “the front door” and MASH, to redirect those families who do not need a statutory intervention to Early Help services.

The policy would be reviewed within 6 months in line with further work in early help to move to a “Family Help Hub” model and to align the statutory services more closely with targeted help.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Director of Children’s Services and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on the following:

- Demonstrating improvement
- Confidence to step down versus risk aversion
- Numbers stepped down and up
- Supporting evidence based decisions of professionals
- Contacts, referrals and re-referrals and training for partners

RESOLVED that the Board noted the content of the report and progress and the Board would like to support the evidence based decisions our professional social workers make.

18. **Quality Assurance Auditing**

Further to Minute 63/15 the Scrutiny Board considered the briefing note of the Director of Children’s Services, which updated members on progress regarding Quality Assurance and Auditing over the last six months.

The Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Framework was revised in December 2015. It focused specifically on casework services for children provided by children’s social care and early help services with an emphasis on quality

assurance that underpinned continuous improvement. The framework had been used to support improved outcomes. A revised Audit schedule for 2016 was part of the framework which was updated monthly.

Since November 2015 there had been a renewed and relentless focus on improving the quality of practice through the audit and review cycle, which was linked to developing practice through the use of supervision, team meetings, practice improvement forums and manager briefings. The service had developed a more robust programme of audits to inform continuous practice.

The headlines from the audits were:

1. Children were seen, and they listened to.
2. Social Workers were committed and motivated.
3. There were some examples of good practice.
4. Early help workers were proactive and tenacious when intervening with families.
5. There were early signs that practice was becoming less reactive.
6. Conferences were beginning, through Signs of Safety to consider a more collaborative approach.
7. Care planning continued to cause concern, with drift and lack of contingency planning.
8. Neglect and “start again” syndrome was highly visible on a high proportion of cases including those held in early help.
9. Focus was on assessment, rather than on intervention, impact and outcomes.
10. Looked after Children, had too many moves.
11. Life Story work continued to be inconsistent.
12. Placement sufficiency had a negative impact on the ability of the service to identify appropriate placements for those young people ready for independence.
13. Whilst children were being seen, it was sometimes unclear about the purpose of the visit or nature of the intervention.
14. Recording was still inconsistent
15. Use of chronologies was not routine or properly understood.
16. Supervision was task focused and not reflective.

Through examination of data, the following additional audits were identified as necessary:

1. Re referrals (% was rising)
2. Placement Stability (% of children with 3 or more placements increasing)
3. Use of Police Powers (numbers appeared high in comparison with statistical neighbours)
4. Thresholds (LSCB audit, following high number of families receiving one visit and No Further Action)
5. Care Planning (LSCB audit, concern that care plans do not reflect outcomes for children rather they detail actions for parents)
6. Early Help (re-referral audit identified potential issues with step-up and step-down)
7. Ofsted preparation audit.

The Scrutiny Board commended the Director of Children's Services for providing the honest headline list from audits which the Board would like to use as a focus for Scrutiny of improvements, however, they were concerned that progress was slow when time and money had been invested in improvements.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Director of Children's Services and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on the following:

- Communication with staff prior to audits
- Blockages to getting improvements in place
- Whether the Audit toolkit was assessing the right things
- Staff difficulties with the tool kit and judging the impact on the child
- New restructure plans
- The list of headlines as a focus for the Board on improvement

The Director of Children's Services recognised the challenges of progress and explained the national and regional problems local authorities were experiencing with the social work system and the challenges of managing agency workers. The Director reassured the Board that officers were committed to making improvements and the Scrutiny Board offered support to the Cabinet Members. The Director was grateful for the establishment of the Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group and also agreed that successes be celebrated.

RESOLVED that the information presented and the progress made to date be noted and the progress on headlines from the audits where improvement was required be reported back on regularly to the Board. The Board would also write to the Cabinet Member commending the Director for providing the list as a focus for improvement and request the Cabinet Member's view on these as crucial targets.

19. **Staying Put Arrangements and Policy**

Further to Minute 54/15 the Scrutiny Board considered the briefing note of the Director of Children's Services which updated members on the Staying Put arrangements and policy. The policy was approved by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on 8th December 2015 (minute 26/15 refers).

The Staying Put policy had been revised to fully consider the recommendations of the Fostering Task and Finish group which concluded in March 2015 (minute 54/14 refers). The recommendations included that additional research and monitoring was undertaken to inform the policy in respect of the following issues.

- a. the affect that any potential drop in income has on the number of staying put places offered to young people
- b. the number of young people who would like to stay put and aren't able to as their carers don't offer,
- c. the statutory requirements and associated funding implications

When a young person becomes 18 they are no longer in the care of the Local Authority. However the local authority continue to be involved in providing leaving care services, including supporting arrangements for a young person to continue to live with former foster parents. This was a separate arrangement from fostering, known as 'Staying Put'. Under the Staying Put scheme, young people

continue to live with their former foster carer(s) after they reach the age of 18 until they are ready to move on to independence, or reach the age of 21.

Within Coventry there was a history of Care Leavers staying with carers beyond the age of 18 as the benefits of remaining with their former foster carers were clear, particularly where young people were vulnerable, not ready to move to independence or continuing in education. The Staying Put policy was reviewed in order to reflect changes to the legal framework, and to more clearly set out the implications for foster carers of entering into the scheme.

The briefing note also included information about the Legal framework, the profile and numbers of young people Staying Put and financial implications.

The Scrutiny Board noted that in Coventry we have recognised for a long time that young people need support beyond 18, including those Looked After and were therefore thankful for a formal policy.

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

- recent press coverage regarding Local Authorities and Looked after Children
- Private Foster Care Companies
- The Value of the support and not just the cost

RESOLVED that the Board noted the content of the report and progress and that the Chair and the Director of Children’s Services agreed to look at the recent BBC article about Care-Leavers and to consider ways of addressing the issues in a local context.

20. **Outstanding Issues**

The Scrutiny Board noted the briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator regarding outstanding actions requested by the Board.

21. **Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Board noted the work programme and requested that officers schedule some dates for Education Issues.

The Chair informed the Board that there would be some training for Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding and a Seminar on Childhood Obesity scheduled for members of the Board shortly.

RESOLVED that the work programme be updated

22. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 3.30 pm)