

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Eileen Quick (Chairman), Marion Mills (Vice-Chairman), John Bowden, Sayonara Luxton and Edward Wilson

Also in attendance: Councillors Natasha Airey and Simon Dudley

Officers: Kevin McDaniel, Hilary Hall, Shilpa Manek, Jacqueline Hurd, Lynne Lidster and Rob Stubbs

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Nicola Pryer and Lynne Jones and Alison Alexander.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Simon Dudley declared a non pecuniary interest in item 5 as he is the Founder and Chair of Governors at Holyport College and his wife is a Founder and a Governor at Holyport College and he is the Chair of Governors at Riverside Primary School. This was not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest therefore he stayed and considered the item.

Councillor Edward Wilson declared a personal interest in item 5 as his son attends Holyport College.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2017 were approved as a true and correct record after the following amendment:

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Resolved unanimously: that Cllr Quick be appointed as Chairman and Cllr Bowden be appointed as Vice-Chairman.

This need to be changed to:

Resolved unanimously: that Cllr Quick be appointed as Chairman for the municipal year and Cllr Bowden be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

The Panel then voted for the Vice Chairman position. Councillor E Wilson put forward nomination for Councillor Marion Mills and this was seconded by Councillor Luxton.

Resolved unanimously: that Cllr Mills be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the rest of the municipal year.

COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT

Jacqui Hurd presented the Compliments and Complaints Report to the Panel.

Points that were highlighted included:

- The report covered the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.
- Reports on compliments and complaints made by or on behalf of customers that are investigated under the Statutory Children's Complaints Policy.

- It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report for the Children's Statutory Complaints Policy and this would be published as a combined report with the Adults Statutory Complaints Policy.
- A total of 802 complaints were received, 58 in Children's Services.
- The Complaints and Children's team worked very hard with families they are directly working with.
- The statutory Children's Services complaints process changed in September 2006 following new regulations and guidance, 'Getting the Best from Complaints'. The guidance emphasises that "vulnerable children and young people must get the help they need, when they need it, however large or small their complaint". The scope of what could be complained about was also expanded and prospective adopters and foster carers are included as 'qualifying individuals' who could complain under the social care process.
- Understanding why complaints were made, establishing root causes, changing processes and delivering training as a result was essential. Listening to customers and reflecting on examples of where we have not got it right could reveal or highlight opportunities for improvement and increase satisfaction. The speed of response was key particularly if the complaint stemmed from a timeliness related issue. Even if a complaint was not upheld there could be some learning from that complaint with improvements arising as a result. The complaints process and the feedback gained was an integral part of the quality assurance process, which fed into the development and monitoring of services. Learning from complaints was reviewed by services at team meetings. The points below shows the specific learning in 2016-17.
 - Refresher training for data protection.
 - Awareness and impact training on communicating key facts effectively to parents working with Children's Services.
 - Policy change to contact families within three days when new allocation made.
 - Raised awareness on assumptions not made when first meeting young people about what they want to discuss, and to "check-in" directly with the young person to ensure that they are comfortable throughout.
 - Maintain continuity of social workers involved in a case as far as possible.
 - Improved communications between children, young people, parents and professionals including in a timely way.
 - Share reports, information and outcomes of assessments in a timely manner.
 - Reminder for full consultation with all significant family members including non-resident fathers when undertaking a child and family assessment.
 - Check that outcomes and proposed next steps are understood by families working with the service.
 - Training to see things from the user's perspective for a greater understanding.
 - Effective dialogue even when there is dispute including standing firm when necessary and communicating this effectively.

- Whilst the council gets things wrong it does also provide excellent service and our staff often go the extra mile. It was essential that positive feedback was also captured and shared. Compliments that were forwarded to the complaints team were logged centrally and in 2016-17 there were 192 compliments recorded, 56 for Children's Services, an increase of 194% from 2015-16. Compliments received were fed back to the relevant service areas to ensure that due recognition was given to staff and that learning was shared and disseminated across the directorate.
- The table below shows the summary for Children's Services:

Summary

- *58 complaints were received for Children's Services. This represents 7% of the total number of council complaints received.*
- *The two top themes are attitude and behaviour of staff (23%) and failed to take all the information into account (20%).*
- *47% of complaints were either fully or partially upheld.*
- *57% of complaints relate to the POD's (child protection, children in need and children in care) and 26% CYPDS.*
- *62 % were responded to within agreed timeframes compared to 43% in 2015-16.*
- *10 complaints were made to the Local Government Ombudsman, 3 complaints were investigated. 1 was upheld and 2 not upheld.*

- Regardless of the procedure being followed, once the council's policies had been exhausted, the complainant could ask for their complaint to be investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman. Although customers could refer complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman at any stage, the Ombudsman would not normally investigate until the council had exhausted their complaints procedure.
- We performed very well in comparison to other local authorities.

It was raised that future reports should be specific to the Panel they were being presented to. The Panel Agreed unanimously that future reports should be specific to Children's Services.

The Chairman offered a great compliment to all staff in Children's Services and Customer Services. It was a great achievement.

SEND INSPECTION UPDATE

Kevin McDaniel presented the SEND Area Inspection Update to the Panel based on the inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission which took place in July 2017.

Kevin McDaniel highlighted that it was the first time that a SEND Area Inspection had been carried out in the borough. The inspection outcome letter identified strengths including that overall young people with additional needs and disabilities attended, achieved and secured post 18 opportunities better than their peers nationally. Inconsistencies in access to services were identified across the area and many parents reported processes being too difficult and inconsistent when seeking help. Overall the inspectors believed that the weaknesses were such that the Local Authority had to submit a written statement of action to Ofsted by the 24 November 2017.

ACTION: UPDATE ON ACTION PLAN TO PANEL IN BOTH OCTOBER 2017 AND DECEMBER 2017 MEETINGS

The following points were raised about the report;

- This was a very concerning report as some children are being let down.
- A number of parents had made it clear to inspectors that they felt their child was not getting services they were entitled to. While some parents used influence to get more support than others, some pupils were missing out on the right support.
- The report identified that some schools were excellent at picking up on additional needs while others put it down to behavioural issues and did not act upon them.
- This outcome could be attributed to decisions in the past but things were starting to improve now and the Director of Children's Services would identify any additional resources required for consideration by Cabinet in October 2017.
- The report was published on the Ofsted website on 1 September 2017. All state-funded schools were contacted on the first day back at school after the summer holidays for a SEND briefing meeting that was two days later. The attendance to the SEND meeting was 40 schools; only one of which was a secondary school. The panel considered that the attendance was very poor. The secondary schools that did not attend had now all been contacted and there were dates in the diary for meetings to discuss the report and next steps.
- Members asked if AfC were able to assist to improve our services. It was noted that both Kingston and Richmond had not yet been through the SEND inspection process, however they had excellent experience and the RBWM service would be talking to them.
- Independent schools were not invited to the meeting.
- Better communication was required. Having a system where parents and children were not having to repeat the entire case numerous times to different staff. Having continuity for cases.
- Members asked what other authorities did to promote the local offer. There were many ways of communication including an annual "come and try" event, a paper booklet and better joint communication between partners.
- The local Parent Forum was disbanded in 2016 because it was ineffective. A new Parent Forum (PACIP) had been developed to build the trust of parents. This had been supported by the DfE and a grant had also been secured.

Debbie Hartrick, representing the Clinical Commissioning Group, was present at the meeting. They agreed with the recommendations from Ofsted and welcomed any opportunity to improve services as a result. The DCO role had been strengthened as a result of the inspection to better meet the parents. There was a recent parent participation group at which parents said they really valued the family support service.

A school inclusion charter was discussed and members wanted to know how it could be enforced. The charter would be public so schools would be under pressure to sign up and parents could hold local leaders to account. Some other Local Authorities had already taken this approach.

Other points discussed by the panel included:

- Some schools had the wrong attitude: instead of thinking what changes could be made for the child, they were thinking we can't make changes within the school.
- There was a lack of collaboration across the borough. We had some excellent SENCOs and a day conference would be very useful to have all the fantastic people sharing their experiences and talking to each other to improve outcomes.

The Chairman was informed that the Headmaster of Holyport College, Walter Boyle, was in attendance at the meeting and wanted to speak. The Panel unanimously agreed that they allow him to speak even though he had not registered to speak. The Panel felt that it was important to hear what the school had to say.

Walter Boyle, Head of Holyport College made the following points:

- Secondary schools did not attend the SEND meeting as schools were only informed on the first day of term after the summer holidays, with only two days notice. Holyport College were not going to attend as they have lost confidence in the borough.
- Funding from the borough for children with additional needs was not easy to access.
- Holyport College had given a lot of commitment to the borough.
- Holyport residents felt that they could not access their local school because of EHPC pupils and this has been raised with the borough.
- In 2014, 20% of year 7, In 2015, 15.9%, In 2016 18.2% and in 2017, 29.5% were EHCP/looked after/adopted pupils.
- Walter Boyle asked the Panel and the Leader of the Council, who was present at the meeting, that after the meeting, the issues raised would stay on the Agenda and not be forgotten. Councillor Dudley assured the Panel and the Headmaster of Holyport College that this would stay on the Agenda and would go to Cabinet in October. The borough wanted to improve the outcomes for all these children and their parents.

The Chairman highlighted that we were determined to put this right and asked for the action plan to be on the Agenda for the next meeting. The Chairman thanked the officers for their hard work and encouraged schools to assist.

FINANCE REPORT

Although the report had not been included on the Agenda the Chairman agreed to consider it as an urgent item, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Rob Stubbs presented the Finance Report to the Panel.

Points raised by the Panel included:

- The credit facility for Achieving for Children was discussed, the previous bad credit rating that was associated with AfC, had that been included in the risks. Rob Stubbs commented that it would have been considered by all three councils.
- The credit facility had been offered to AfC and would be paid back in arrears.
- A diary of points needed to be kept from the beginning for at least six to nine months for Achieving for Children and to consider what they were really good at and report this back to the Panel in six months, at the March meeting.

ACTION: To add Achieving for Children to work programme for March 2018 meeting.

Councillor Airey commented that it is because schools are not taking up the offer that we have an in-year saving, and I would like all schools to take up the full offer of 3 days' free support in future. Children's services hasn't cut the commitment to provide the service.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN TRANSFER

Hilary Hall presented the Update on Achieving for Children transfer to the Panel. The aim was to update Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the governance arrangements in place to manage the contract for the delivery of children's services through Achieving for Children.

The important point to note that was highlighted, was that proposals and policy issues in relation to children's services in the borough would continue to come from the Lead Member, through the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to Cabinet for determination as they do now – with the delivery of the any resulting decision being effected by staff in Achieving for Children.

The Panel was happy to hear that they would still have the power to scrutinise and agreed unanimously that a report be presented to the Panel again in six months.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.53 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....