

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 21 MARCH 2019

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

Officers: Kevin McDaniel, Andy Carswell, Lin Ferguson, Matthew Edwards and Anna Robinson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Loudon.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Part I minutes of the meeting held on January 29th 2019 be approved as a true and correct record.

UPDATE ON GIRL'S POLICY FORUM

The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help introduced the item and informed Members that the Girls' Policy Forum had been established in April 2018 to better enable girls the opportunity of having an active role in shaping life in the Royal Borough. The Forum had been involved in a range of activities and had played a significant part in suggesting which aspects of Maidenhead town centre needed improvement. Concerns about litter had been raised and awareness posters had been produced at schools as a result. The highlight of the previous year had been a visit from Theresa May, who gave an informal talk on her role as a woman in the public eye.

The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help said that members of the Forum were aged 11-18 and went to the six main secondary schools in the Royal Borough. Members had said that they wanted to have a greater input into policy making and wanted to engage more with the Council, and the Senior Leadership Team had made a commitment to take their views into account when making decisions.

The Chairman noted the Forum's keenness to help resolve littering issues and said she had a trophy from a Best Kept School competition that they could use to encourage pupils to keep their schools tidy.

Cllr Luxton asked why the age range of members had been kept at 11-18 and why input from younger girls was not being sought. The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help said this had been discussed at the Forum and, while ways of involving younger girls were being investigated, it was felt that some of the issues discussed would be too complicated for younger members to fully understand. Past experience of younger pupils' involvement in the annual Takeover Day backed this up. The past year, since the Forum had been established, had mainly focused on building up the confidence of members, before looking at which areas the Forum could help to influence. Helping to set long-term strategies relating to commissioning for children's services was one of the first areas identified where it was agreed that Forum members could make a positive difference over the forthcoming months.

Cllr Luxton asked if there were any plans for the establishment of a similar forum for boys. The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help said the Girls' Policy Forum had been set up primarily to combat inequalities faced by young girls. The Chairman suggested a forum for boys could be investigated after the upcoming elections.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Members noted the contents of the report.

Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Strategy and Performance Manager reminded Members that there were eight performance measures relating to children's services. Of these six had met their targets; one, relating to the uptake of the MMR2 vaccination, was just short of its target but within tolerance; and one – relating to the percentage of children with a review at the age of 2-2.5 – was off target. Uptake of reviews had increased but the performance measure was still below what was considered to be an ambitious target. The Chairman reminded Members that when this issue had been discussed before it had been agreed that this was not necessarily an area for concern as children were receiving reviews by other bodies, such as the nurseries they attended. However the lower than expected takeup of the MMR2 vaccine was thought to be more problematic. The target was 90 per cent and the current rate was 87.4 per cent, which was similar to the overall target across England. Public Health had expressed concerns that if the vaccination rate was any lower then there would be a breakdown in the effectiveness of herd immunity. It was felt that misinformation and public perceptions had led to the lower than hoped-for takeup rate. No trends relating to non takeup due to geography or ethnicity had been identified.

Responding to a question from Cllr Wilson, the Director of Children's Services said it was his understanding that Public Health had a responsibility to raise awareness of available healthcare but not necessarily to implement it. Cllr Wilson said it needed to be made clearer to residents that many aspects of healthcare provision were not the responsibility of the Council, nor should the Council be accountable for it. However it was noted that the Council did have a duty to monitor residents' health. It was suggested that, as a partner agency, available vaccination programmes could be advertised in Around the Royal Borough, so long as it was made clear that the Council was not responsible for them. Cllr Wilson stated that the Council was responsible for inputting into any awareness campaigns.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and:

- i) Endorsed the Q3 2018/19 performance summarised in table 1 and appendix A and;
- ii) Requested relevant Lead Members and Heads of Service focus effort to improve performance in areas of current underperformance.

UPDATE ON FOSTERING

The Associate Director for Provider Services for Achieving for Children introduced the item and outlined the current fostering arrangements provided for the Council on behalf of Achieving for Children. Members were told that the fostering team at the Royal Borough had been incorporated into an Independent Fostering Association following instructions from Ofsted, and that it was felt this new arrangement was an opportunity to refresh the way fostering services were operated and create a foster-friendly atmosphere. A five day inspection of services provided by the new IFA was due to take place later in the year.

The Associate Director for Provider Services for Achieving for Children told Members that carers had said there needed to be a greater effort to ensure the right information was given at the point of a new fostering placement, explaining the needs of the child and the skills of a particular foster carer and why they were viewed as being a good match. Carers had stated that they wanted to be more involved in the placement process, as they perceived themselves as being more familiar with the children compared to the fostering team. The Associate Director for Provider Services for Achieving for Children said improvements in this area

following the implementation of the IFA would help retain existing carers. The IFA also allowed the opportunity for gaps in provision to be filled, and also the possibility for the Royal Borough, Richmond and Kingston to develop areas of expertise that they could share with other local authorities. There had been a drive to develop an expertise in training and development, in order to enable potential carers the possibility of receiving training within two months of their initial enquiry. Looking at greater provision for parent and child fostering – where the parent continued to live with their child due to complex needs – was also being investigated. A supported lodging scheme, where a young person would live with a family without formally being fostered, was being developed. This scheme had the added benefit of allowing families to test to see if providing foster care was suitable for them.

Responding to a question from the Chairman, the Associate Director for Provider Services for Achieving for Children stated that in the case of a child being placed in the care of another family member, that family member would receive the same level of specific training, support and remuneration as a regular foster carer.

Members were told that there was a focus on keeping at-risk children within the Borough as much as possible, rather than far away. There were 45 fostering households in the Royal Borough, but in order for demand to be sufficiently met 82 were needed. Retention rates of carers was stabilising, although morale was sometimes low where a carer had to support a child with particularly complex needs. Cllr Hollingsworth stated that concerns had been raised previously at Panel and at the Corporate Parenting Forum about changeover in staff, workers and management, and how this impacted on carers. The Associate Director for Provider Services for Achieving for Children accepted that providing continuity to carers was a challenge, but it was felt that the current situation was stable. The Director of Children's Services said the proportion of agency staff used had reduced from 23 per cent to 10 per cent, and that this had been done in order to provide greater continuity of support for carers. Members were informed that all carers received the same level of training for helping children with complex needs, whereas before only a limited number of carers had been provided with specialist training. The training also enabled carers to provide care for children across all age ranges from 0-18. All of this, along with the transition to an IFA, had enabled fostering services provided in the Royal Borough to be rated as outstanding, whereas before it had been rated as requiring improvement.

Members noted the improvements to services that were being reported. The contents of the briefing paper were noted.

WORK PROGRAMME

Members were in agreement that the outstanding items listed on the papers relating to the Work Programme should be considered by the new Adult, Children's and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Director of Children's Services said that a number of annual review reports were also due to be completed in May and could be considered at future meetings.

The Chairman informed Members that after the forthcoming elections, all Councillors would receive training on being corporate parents.

Cllr Wilson gave a vote of thanks to the Chairman and to the clerk for their work with the Panel. The Chairman thanked officers for all the support they had provided to the Panel.

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that one of the Panel's co-optees, Paul Loudon, had resigned from his position. Members placed on record their thanks for his work on the Panel.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 7.35 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....