

Joint meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 12th January, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Bains, Brooker, Cheema (from 6.35pm), Dhillon, N Holledge, Malik, Matloob, Pantelic, Rana and Usmani

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Mann and Plenty.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Abe, Bal and Morris.

PART I

37. Election of Chair for the Joint Meeting

It was proposed by Councillor Matloob,
Seconded by Councillor Brooker,

Resolved – That Councillor Nazir be appointed as Chair for the Joint meeting.

38. Declaration of Interest

(Councillor Nazir in the Chair)

Councillor Brooker declared that he was a Governor at Churchmead School and that his daughter attended Langley College.

39. Update from Slough Children's Services Trust

The Interim Director of Children's Services introduced the report, reminding the Committee that Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) had assumed responsibility for children's services from 1 October 2015. The purpose of the report was to update Members on the findings of the benchmark audit and progress on implementation of the recommendations. Members were reminded that although the SCST provided services on behalf of the Council, the Council retained legal obligations for the statutory duties.

Nicola Clemo, Chief Executive of SCST and Elaine Simpson, Chair of the Trust Board were welcomed to the meeting. Ms Clemo provided an update with regard to the transition of services and the findings of the benchmarking audit. Within a week of assuming responsibility for children's services, SCST launched the vision for the future of the service. The vision set out the areas of improvement under four key themes – improving quality, improving information, improving workforce and improving learning.

The Committee were informed that the primary focus within the first week was to ensure the safe transition of 1500 open cases and to ensure colleagues

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were fully supported in managing the transition. Targets set within the first few weeks included:

- Establishment of new management and governance arrangements.
- Review of quality assurance framework and introduction of new framework.
- Meeting stakeholders and key partners to assess level of confidence in the service.
- Development of placement and sufficiency strategy.
- Delegated responsibilities document reviewed and re-launched.
- Review of complaints service undertaken.
- Chief Executive of the Trust meeting with Children in Care Council.
- Appointed Head of Quality and Performance and Data Analyst
- Removal of Assistant Director post from management structure.
- Launched informal consultation on developing Slough's social work model and engagement of over 200 staff.
- Conducted staff survey in week one.
- New person specifications developed for Social Worker, Senior Social Worker, Consultant Practitioners and Practice Managers.
- Commissioned benchmarking audit conducted by five independent children's social care specialists.

This work was carried out in conjunction with gathering of intelligence on the state of service. Gaps in provision were identified, including the absence of a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Strategy and a failure to meet statutory guidance around return interviews for children who were missing from care. It was also highlighted that there was a degree of complacency relating to basic practice standards, eg recording of information.

Over a two week period a total of 30 case reviews were undertaken. Two cases were escalated as they met the threshold criteria that the child was at risk of harm or not having their needs met. In total 50 percent of cases were judged inadequate, 25 percent required improvement and 25 percent were good.

Members were informed that within the second week of the transfer of services, five independent social care specialists were commissioned to undertake a benchmarking audit. The audit confirmed that the 'front door' was unsafe and the Trust had to take immediate remedial action to secure a safe service. This included the removal of a number of interim managers who were unaware of the level of risk and who had failed to take swift action to address the shortfalls in service. The initial findings of the audit included:

- No Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub established.
- Lack of clarity on Early Help Pathways.
- Lack of rigour within performance data for service.
- Absence of strategic document on CSE and missing children which compounds on the operational service.
- No Quality Assurance Framework.

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The audit also identified a number of strengths including an open and engaging approach to the audit process by staff and a commitment to learn and do the 'right thing'.

The Committee were informed that the audit had made 17 recommendations, all of which had been taken forward. Implementation of and progress on the recommendations were outlined.

A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion including:

- *Query regarding the establishment of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).* It was noted that the MASH included representatives from a number of partner agencies, including the police and health and it was anticipated that it would be established in the near future.
- *Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers / Staff Morale.* The Committee were informed that investment in staff was identified as a key element in addressing the issue of retention. A career pathway plan would be implemented for social workers, offering specialist training, management training and secondment opportunities. Funds had been secured from the Department for Education to employ clinicians to assist social workers to examine issues from a different perspective. Continuous professional development would contribute to building expertise and embedding good practice within the service. It was envisaged that the impact of these measures would contribute to a reduction in the number of agency staff required. Although a 'no blame' culture had been adopted following the transition of services, it was highlighted that there would be a nil tolerance approach for reckless practice.
- *Details regarding the implementation of a system for tracking and responding to missing children.* It was brought to Members attention that a partnership approach with colleagues in Thames Valley Police identified those children at risk of CSE and timely and appropriate action was taken when necessary. Furthermore, a CSE Co-Ordinator had recently been appointed.
- *Measures taken to improve school attendance and achievement of Looked After Children.* The Committee were informed that the Schools Forum had agreed to fund the role of a Virtual Head Teacher. A review of the issue of Pupils Premium fund for Looked After Children would also be reviewed by the Schools Forum.
- *Timetable to achieve a Good OFSTED rating for the service.* Ms Clemo stated that the target was to achieve a good rating within three years and outstanding in five years. The recent OFSTED inspection would help determine the priorities for the Trust. Responding to whether the Trust had an Improvement Plan, it was explained that a Vision Strategy had been produced, although an Improvement Plan was likely to be formulated to respond to the findings of the Ofsted inspection.
- *Factors that had led to services being taken over by the Trust – poor leadership, lack of scrutiny etc.* It was stated that strong leadership and clear outcomes were essential in improving and moving the service forward. Communication with partner agencies and engagement with

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the service users were vital. It was important that aspirations for Looked After Children were raised and Members were key in contributing towards this in their role as Corporate Parents.

- *Clarity regarding accountability of the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).* It was explained that whilst the LSCB Chair was responsible for holding the various agencies involved to account, Slough Borough Council was responsible for holding the LSCB Chair to account. Following meetings with partner agencies, a number of changes had been implemented, to highlight that their concerns had been taken seriously and to improve the reputation of the service as a credible partner. It was highlighted that there was also a willingness from partners to improve the service.
- *Whistleblowing Policy / Staff Survey.* It was confirmed that whilst the Trust had a Whistleblowing Policy in place, it was envisaged that following a culture change within the service, staff would be more confident in raising issues with management. A staff survey had been conducted within the first week of transfer of services, which would be used as a baseline comparator following the second survey which would be carried out in March 2016. It was agreed that details of the survey that had been completed would be circulated to Members of the Joint Committee. Responding to what, if any, concerns the Trust may have with regard to potential changes in leadership at the Council, it was stated that procedures would need to be adopted that ensured that changes in leadership did not have an impact on services. It was stated that a good working relationship was required between the Council and the Trust with a shared vision in improving services for Looked After Children.
- *Anticipated pressures on service.* Ms Clemo explained that a Sufficiency Strategy had been developed to address any anticipated increase in the number of children entering the care system. Early Help to families was critical and a number of outreach help/programmes were in the process of being developed. It was agreed that the Sufficiency Strategy would be circulated to the Committee.

The Chair stated that communication between the Council and the Trust was vital to developing an effective working relationship in securing the delivery of the best possible services for children.

Resolved –

- a) The Committee noted that the service previously provided had not been good enough.
- b) That Slough Children's Services Trust's plans for improvements to the Service be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm)