

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 25th October, 2017.

Present:- Councillors Brooker (Chair), Anderson (from 6.38pm), Carter, Chahal and Qaseem

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Mercedes Hernandez Estrada – Secondary School Teacher Representative

Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Hamzah Ahmed – Slough Youth Parliament

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Kelly, Chohan and N Holledge

PART 1

12. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Brooker declared his positions as Governor at Churchmead and Ryvers Schools. He also declared his membership of Slough Borough Council's (SBC) Foster Panel.

Hamzah Ahmed declared his membership of the Local Safeguarding Panel and his position as Governor at Cippenham Primary School.

13. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18th July 2018

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2017 be approved as a correct record.

14. Action Progress Report

Resolved: That the Action Progress Report be noted.

15. Member Questions

The responses to the members' questions were circulated to the Panel.

Resolved: That the responses be noted.

16. Children's Social Care Ofsted 3rd Monitoring Visit

The 3rd Monitoring Visit took place in mid-June 2017, and had identified some improvements in the provision made by Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST). The cases examined by the Ofsted team had not identified any children who could be classified as 'at risk', whilst the appointment of a Senior Leadership Team who were all permanent staff had created a more stable environment.

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(At this point, Cllr Anderson joined the meeting).

There had also been evidence that the 'Signs of Safety' methodology was delivering benefits. However, it was recognised that the hub model of social work delivery and the related weekly conversations required more managerial oversight. Whilst SCST's actions were improving, the recording of this information still needed to improve. In addition, SCST was investigating its use of Public Law Outline and whether this should be increased. The working relationship between SBC and SCST was also noted as a positive.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Since the letter had been published, SCST had focused on its use of Public Law Outline and making managerial oversight more robust. As part of this, a manager had recently been appointed and was conducting masterclasses (with a particular focus on planning to ensure children were placed in permanent care settings). The culture of management was also changing to ensure closer working with families where appropriate.
- The Director of Children's Services from Essex County Council would be visiting SCST in October 2017 to investigate the use of Public Law Outline and offer challenge on SCST's approach. The individual concerned had been selected as they were seen as a national leader in the area.
- External training was being provided by two trainers on private fostering as well as other areas.
- At present, some conversations were not being recorded in sufficient depth. However, audits had noted that record keeping was improving; SCST's first file check had highlighted that 50% of case files were inadequate, a figure that now stood at 18.8% (with 3 files rated as 'outstanding'). To continue this trend, SCST were encouraging social workers to describe the more abstract elements of children's experiences.
- Members would be discussing the 4th Monitoring Visit on 7th December 2017. This would be with a view to having improvements which could be proved with evidence, rather than assurances from management.
- The main challenge remaining from staff inherited by SCST was confidence. This manifested itself from an unwillingness to challenge the views of others involved in the process. Training would be central to improving this; however, the number of issues relating to capability had reduced significantly.
- The team was also expanding the disciplines covered by its staff (e.g. speech / language therapy).
- Early Intervention Hubs involved family support workers as well as social workers. These had been a significant focus for improvement efforts, and were aimed at children who were close to being taken into care. Events such as family group conferences were organised to intercept cases before they deteriorated and offer appropriate support.
- Re-referral rates were not currently an issue. However, the reasons for the ending of child protection plans needed to be clearly documented.

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- Upon taking over the service, SCST had placed 100 children on protection plans in the first 6 months as the numbers of plans had fallen significantly prior to the Trust going live. However, the number of plans had risen as SCST appraised new cases. SCST was confident that it could justify why any individual in its care was on a plan. Given that Ofsted had not identified any children not on a plan as 'at risk', this suggested that decision making was of a good standard.
- In cases where modern slavery may be an issue, SCST was obliged to investigate the matter. This was a labour intensive responsibility.

Resolved: That an item on the 4th Monitoring Visit be added to the agenda for 7th December 2017.

17. Five Year Plan - Outcome 1 Group Progress Report

The report covered the key action entitled "ensure children and young people are supported to be safe, secure and successful" and outlined the relevant metrics. The number of children on protection plans was below national and local averages, with neglect being the main category. However, it should be noted that the number here was not a KPI as such, as being above or below the average could be justifiable (or in error) depending on the local situation.

The Early Help Strategy was designed to offer support as soon as an issue emerged. As part of this, the Early Help Board had held its inaugural meeting on 18th September 2017, and had drafted the strategy as included in the agenda papers. A Task & Finish Group had also been set up to start on 10th November 2017, which would work at an operational level on the strategy. This would help ensure that the early help offer would be relevant and clear for those involved.

The Local Area Collaboratives were created to bring key partners together. This included diverse bodies such as schools, police, the housing service, the voluntary sector and health professionals. By using these existing personnel and resources, solutions tailored to local and individual needs would be designed.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Neglect was measured using a range of criteria used by the Child Protection Conference. Social workers would present a report, with other professionals then examining the issues raised. This would range from elementary checks such as whether the fridge contained food, to more nebulous discussions over the environment in which the child was being raised. The only areas being examined in such discussions were the parents, carers involved and care being paid to the child.
- The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service could often have long waiting times for its services. As a result, these would be circulated to members (although it should be borne in mind that CAMHS was a multi-faceted service and figures relating to it should be analysed with due care to this).

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- Slough's percentage of children not in education, employment or training ran below national and local averages.

Resolved:

1. That the Panel receive information regarding average waiting times for the CAMHS service.
2. That the Panel receive a copy of the 'Little Book of Sunshine'.
3. That the Panel receive a definition of 'rapid response' in the context of Children's Services.

18. Section 11 Audits

The Children Act 2004 stipulates that all organisations that deal with children must promote and safeguard their welfare. This was to be done in a manner which would satisfy the 8 standards outlined in the Act. The audits discussed in the report were to ensure that all services of their safeguarding role (even if they were not dealing directly with children). They also applied to outsourced services.

The audits had been refreshed in February 2017. There had also been the creation of a Corporate 'Champions' Group to raise staff awareness at all levels. June 2017 had seen Slough's progress discussed at the Audit Committee of the Pan-Berkshire Safeguarding Children's Board; progress was noted, although some challenge was offered regarding the provision of evidence for the quality of work taking place. This matter was now being raised with the Corporate 'Champions' Group.

Safeguarding training had been held on 18th October 2017; initial feedback had suggested that this had been well received. In addition, SBC had recently filled posts focusing on safeguarding and the Prevent agenda. SBC had identified areas for action:

- Robust induction and safeguarding training for volunteers.
- Robust procurement procedures for suppliers, ensuring that safeguarding issues are covered.
- Recruitment policies needed to reinforce the culture of safeguarding across SBC.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Champions were responsible for ensuring that safeguarding was promoted within their service area. There was confidence that this matter was understood, although the exact language of Section 11 may not be so well publicised.
- Whilst work was ongoing and it was understood that awareness could be raised. However, the following initiatives had boosted the issue's profile:
 - Neighbourhood Teams had introduced cue cards to assist them in tenant liaison and making decisions on escalating concerns.
 - Safeguarding training had been given to taxi drivers.

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- Staff of the new Repairs, Maintenance and Investment service provider had received relevant training. Meanwhile, those due to return to SBC when Environmental Services came back in house on 1st December 2017 would also receive training.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

19. Childhood Obesity - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The Panel requested an update on the progress made on the recommendations made by the 2014 Childhood Obesity Report.
- Members raised concerns over the national picture, where some professionals had speculated that this generation of children could be the first with shorter life expectancy than their parents. Concerns that not enough was being done at a local level were also expressed.
- Despite the concerns officers had that the KPIs on childhood obesity were likely to remain 'red' for the medium term future, the latest figures for under 5s had been rated as 'green'.
- 21st November 2017 would see a meeting of all Chairs and Vice Chairs of the 4 scrutiny panels. This could be used to co-ordinate activity between the Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if appropriate.

Resolved: That the Panel receive an update on the progress made on the recommendations of the 2014 Childhood Obesity Report.

20. Forward Work Programme

Members would be supplied with the dates of potential meetings with head teachers once these had been identified.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.

21. Attendance Record

Resolved: That the attendance record be noted.

22. Date of Next Meeting - 7th December 2017

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.32 pm and closed at 7.46 pm)