

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 28th June, 2011 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)
Councillor K Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors L Brown, S Gardiner, P Hoyland, D Mahon, D Neilson, W Livesley,
G Merry and B Silvester

Apologies

John McCann, Jill Kelly and Councillor Hilda Gaddum

In Attendance

Councillor Rhoda Bailey

Officers

Lorraine Butcher	Director of Children's Services
Fintan Bradley	Head of Strategy, Planning & Performance
Cath Knowles	Head of safeguarding & Specialist Services
Glynis Williams	Safeguarding Manager (Reviews and Conferences)
Mark Grimshaw	Scrutiny Officer

65 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That subject to the following amendments the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2011 be approved as a correct record.

- a) That on page 3, the words 'and contrary to national and local policy' be added after the words 'false economy' in part b) of the item relating to the minutes of the previous meeting.
- b) That on page 3, the words 'and savings in the discretionary budget could have the impact of increasing the statutory budget' be added after the words 'school places modelling' in part c) of the item relating to the minutes of the previous meeting.
- c) That on page 4, on the third line of bullet point one, the sentence beginning '...it was suggested' be changed to '...it was suggested that any such change of policy required further and wider debate and a decision by the full Council...' relating to the item on Home to School Transport

66 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest.

67 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public who wished to address the Committee.

68 ANNUAL UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CONTACT, ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL ARRANGEMENTS - ACTION PLAN

Lorraine Butcher, Director of Children's Services attended to provide an overview of the Unannounced Inspection process and to explain the resulting action plan which had emerged from it.

It was explained that an Annual Unannounced Inspection was a two day inspection in which no notice was given as to when it would occur. It was reported that the inspection focused on the contact, referral and assessment arrangements in Cheshire East and that the function of the inspection was to examine the robustness of the existing processes.

Lorraine Butcher reported that the inspectors had felt that Cheshire East had improved following from the 2010 inspection and it had been commented that the service had felt 'well managed'. Consequently, there had been no priority actions identified during the inspection. Having said this, Lorraine Butcher explained that there had been a number of areas identified for improvement, which the service was working to rectify.

Attention was drawn to the action plan. It was explained that this was a document which helped the service to ensure that they were achieving on all of the areas identified for improvement by the inspection. It was noted that the embedded reports within the action plan demonstrated the work that was going on to achieve said improvements.

As a final point, it was reported that the service was currently going through the Annual Announced Inspection and that the action plan from this would supersede the Unannounced Inspection action plan.

After considering the report, Members raised a number of queries.

Firstly, a concern was expressed that it appeared that there had been little progress made on a number of issues highlighted for improvement from the 2010 inspection. In responding to this, Lorraine Butcher explained that the service had inherited some significant challenges since Local Government Reorganisation and as a result a wholesale programme of change and restructure had been required. Therefore, it was asserted that there had been very few 'quick wins' and that the substantial changes required would take time to embed and produce results. Furthermore, it was also explained that Cheshire East relied on the work of partners to make the requisite improvements and that it would take time to get all agencies working together and in the same direction. As an aside, Lorraine Butcher noted that Ofsted had recognised this issue and had articulated it in their letter following the inspection.

A general point regarding performance measures was raised. It was stated that it was not demonstrated clearly enough how the improvements would be measured and success illustrated. Lorraine Butcher agreed that when future action plans were brought to the Committee this would be improved upon.

Following from this, it was queried whether the recently implemented 'structured programme to systematically audit the quality of assessments' outlined in point 6(a) of the action plan would provide the rigorous performance management needed. It was confirmed that this process of auditing Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs) was only just embedding but that they were confident that the process would be commended by Ofsted. It was suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to receive a briefing on the CAF process with a number of anonymised cases outlined to help illustrate the child's journey through the process. It was also suggested that periodic reports on safeguarding performance should be brought to the Committee for review.

Attention was drawn to the point raised regarding the reliance that Cheshire East had on partners to achieve the necessary improvements. It was queried whether it would be appropriate for the Committee to receive a report on how the service were engaging with partners in terms of contact, assessments and referrals. It was agreed that this would be useful.

A query was raised with regards to the Children's Trust Board as it was questioned whether there was any value to it. Lorraine Butcher explained that although the statutory requirements on the Board were to be superseded by the Health and Wellbeing Board, Cheshire East had decided to maintain it was the only place where it was possible to get a concentrated multi-agency meeting on child centred issues. It was suggested that if the Board was to continue, it would be germane if the Committee received the minutes from the meetings.

A final point was made with regards to the language in which the action plan was presented. It was contended that the large number of acronyms along with the use of technical language made the document difficult to read. It was suggested that when future documents were brought to the Committee, consideration was given to these points.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That when bringing future action plans for consideration by the Committee, they be presented in 'plain English' with quantifiable and clear performance measures.
- c) That the Committee receive an update on how the service engaged with partners in terms of contact, assessments and referrals.
- d) That periodic safeguarding performance reports be brought to the Committee for consideration.
- e) That the Committee receive the minutes of the Children's Trust Board.

69 CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY UPDATE

Mindful of that fact that there were a number of new Members on the Committee, Lorraine Butcher provided a general overview of 'Corporate Parenting' as a concept. It was explained that 'Corporate Parenting' emphasised the collective responsibility of Cheshire East to achieve good parenting for children and young people in its care. It was reported that this was done by ensuring that every time a Cared for Child or Young Person interacted with a Cheshire East Service, the principle of 'Corporate Parenting' was considered and acted upon.

Attention was drawn to the newly formed Corporate Parenting Board whose role was to bring together a number of services to look at all aspects of a child's life and to work out how that life could be improved. It was noted that there were two members of the Children in Care Council who sat on the Board.

Lorraine Butcher continued to outline the outcomes following the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. It was reported that there had been an overall improvement in outcomes for children cared for by Cheshire East. For instance, they were performing better at school, having their health needs met and were in more stable care placements.

After congratulating the service on their performance, particularly in improving educational attainment, a number of queries were raised.

It was questioned how long Cheshire East were responsible for Cared for Children and Young People. It was confirmed that the authority were statutorily responsible until the age of 18 unless the young person was in further education in which case, support continued throughout this period. Having said this, it was noted that Cheshire East thought it good practice to maintain support post 18 and that the post 16 service had a role in this.

With reference to the graph on p.25, attention was drawn to the way that the percentage of placements in external provision was increasing. It was queried why this was so and whether there was a cost implication. Lorraine Butcher confirmed that due to Cheshire East having to close inadequate internal provision; use of external provision had gone up. It was reported that this did have a cost implication but that the service were confident in reducing this as more internal provision was made available.

It was queried how Cheshire East worked with the health authorities in terms of Cared for Children. In particular, it was questioned how well the authority worked with CAMHS. It was reported that Cheshire East mainly relied on health visitors to refer cases. It was contended that relationships with GPs and the CAMHS service could improve and that Cheshire East was being proactive in trying to achieve this.

In terms of the figures demonstrating the improvement of educational attainment, it was suggested that it would be useful to have the average attainment figures for mainstream pupils so that comparisons could be made.

It was also suggested that the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board could be circulated to the Members of the Committee.

As a final point, the Chairman asked if there had been any progress of the recommendation made as part of the Fostering Review which suggested that on every report or policy document there should be a heading asking the writer to consider the impact on corporate parenting. Lorraine Butcher confirmed that she would take up the issue to Corporate Management Team.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be received.
- b) That when receiving future reports on the educational attainment figures of Cared for Children, the average figures of mainstream pupils be included for comparison.
- c) That the Committee receive the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- d) That the Director of Children's Services suggests to Corporate Management Team that a 'Corporate Parenting' heading be added to all corporate reports and policy documents.

70 REGULATION 33 BI-ANNUAL REPORT

Glynis Williams, Safeguarding Manager, attended to provide the Bi Annual Report for Regulation 33 Visits. It was explained that Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 Act required a monthly visit to children's homes and units ran by the local authority by a person not employed at the home nor directly responsible for it.

It was reported that visits had taken place at the following settings:

- Priors Hill – Langley Unit
- Claremont Road
- Broad Street

Glynis Williams commented that the visits had gone well and that this was demonstrated by the positive feedback outlined on p.60. It was asserted that one of the main reasons for the positive visits was that the training provided for the visitors was of good quality which had enabled them to adequately challenge and question. With this in mind, it was suggested that a training session should be set up for new Members on the Regulation 33 rota and that it would also be useful for experienced Members to attend as a refresher session.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be received.
- b) That a training session be arranged for Members on the Regulation 33 rota.

71 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members considered the work programme. It was suggested that an informal briefing session be arranged in order to go through the CAF process using a

number of anonymised examples of various children's journeys through the system.

Members also suggested a number of other items for future consideration:

- The impact on Council Services following the opening of Academies.
- The future of careers advice following the reduction in the Connexions Service. The issue was raised over how pupils in schools would manage to receive objective, wide ranging and supportive advice in relation to future educational and vocational training.
- School Organisation Review – incorporating the changing pattern of admissions. Possible Task and Finish Review.

It was also agreed to establish a Task and Finish Review to explore the 16+ Service. The provisional Membership of the Task and Finish Group was agreed:

- Councillor Stewart Gardiner
- Councillor Louise Brown
- Councillor Bill Livesley
- Councillor Ken Edwards
- Councillor Dennis Mahon

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Membership of Task and Finish Groups could also be extended to other non-Executive Members not on the Committee who might have a particular interest in the topic. It was suggested that the establishment of the Task & Finish Group be circulated to other eligible Members.

RESOLVED –

a) That the work programme be noted and amended to include the following items:

- i. An informal briefing session to go through the CAF process using a number of anonymised examples of various children's journeys through the system.
- ii. The impact on Council Services following the opening of Academies.
- iii. The future of careers advice following the reduction in the Connexions Service.
- iv. School Organisation Review – incorporating the changing pattern of admissions. Possible Task and Finish Review.

b) That a Task and Finish Group looking at the 16+ Service be established with the following provisional Membership:

- Councillor Stewart Gardiner
- Councillor Louise Brown
- Councillor Bill Livesley
- Councillor Ken Edwards
- Councillor Dennis Mahon

- c) That other eligible Members of the Council be informed of the establishment of the Task and Finish Group.

72 FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS

The Committee gave consideration to the extracts of the forward plan which fell within the remit of the Committee.

RESOLVED - That the forward plan be noted.

73 CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET

There were no consultations from Cabinet.

The meeting commenced at 1.35 pm and concluded at 3.35 pm

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)